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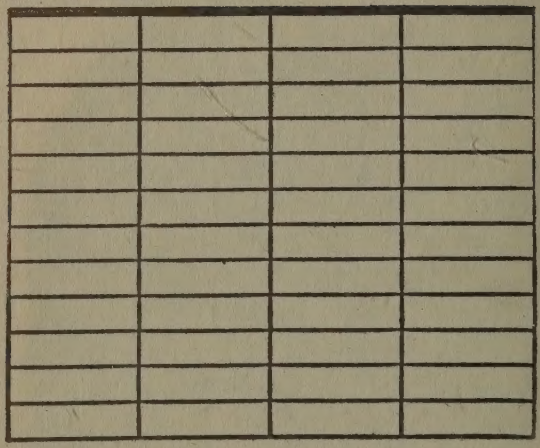

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ANDIVIUS HEDULIO

Adventures of a Roman Nobleman in the Days of the Empire

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BY

EDWARD LUCAS WHITE
AUTHOR OF "EL SUPREMO," ETC.

White - Andivius Hedulio.
The adventures of a Roman nobleman in the days of the empire. Full of action and detailed description of the life of that period.

Mirum atque inscitum somniavi somnium.
—PLAUTUS

42166

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

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First printing ..... *October, 1921*
Second " ..... " *1921*
Third " ..... " *1921*
Fourth " ..... " *1921*
Fifth " ..... *January, 1922*
Sixth " ..... *January, 1923*
Seventh " ..... *August, 1924*
Eighth " ..... *October, 1925*
Ninth " .....*August, 1926*

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Printed in the United States of America

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

WHO, IN READING FICTION, LOVED

"THE OPEN ROAD AND THE BRIGHT EYES OF DANGER"

42186

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ANDIVIUS HEDULIO

HEDULIO'S PREFACE

(PRÆFATIO HEDULIONIS)

BY no means absurd, it seems to me, but altogether reasonable, is the impulse which urges me to write out a detailed narrative of my years of adversity and of the vicissitudes which befell me during that wretched period of my life. My adventures, in themselves, were worthy of record and my memories of them and of the men and women encountered in them are clear and vivid. It is natural that I should wish to set them down for the edification of my posterity and of any who may chance to read them.

For my experience has been, I believe, unique. Since the establishment of the Principate in our Republic many men, even an uncountable horde of men, have incurred Imperial displeasure. Of these not a few, after banishment from Italy or relegation to guarded islands or to some distant frontier outpost, have survived the Prince who exiled them and have, by the favor of his successors, been permitted to return to Rome and to the enjoyment of their property. But I believe that no Roman nobleman implicated, justly or unjustly, in any conspiracy against the life of his Sovereign, ever escaped the extreme penalty of death. Some, by their own hands, forestalled the arrival of the Imperial emissaries, others perished by the weapons or implements of those designated to abolish the enemies of the Prince. Except myself not one ever survived to regain Imperial favor in a later reign; except myself not one ever recovered his patrimony

and enjoyed, to a green old age, the income, position and privileges to which he had been born. If such a thing ever occurred, certainly there is no record of any other nobleman domiciled in Italy, except myself, having grasped at the slender chance of escape afforded by the device of arranging that he be supposed dead, of disguising himself, of vanishing among the populace, of passing himself off for a man of the people. I not only was led, by my clever slave, to attempt this histrionic feat, but I succeeded in the face of unimaginable difficulties. An experience so notably without a parallel seems peculiarly deserving of such a record as follows.

BOOK I

DISASTER

CHAPTER I

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

WHEN I look back on the beginning of my adventures, I can set the very day and hour when the tranquil course of my early life came to an end, when the comfortable commonplaces of my previous existence altered, when the placid current of my former life broke suddenly and without warning into the tumultuous rapids which hurried me from surprise to surprise and from peril to peril. The last hour of my serene youth was about the ninth of the day, nearly midafternoon, on the Nones of June in the 937th year of the city,* while Cossonius Marullus and Papirius Aelian were consuls, when Commodus had already been four years Emperor.

It was not that misfortune then suddenly overwhelmed me, not that, sharp as a blown trumpet, I heard the voice of doom blare over me; not that, as one sees the upper rim of the sun vanish beneath the waves where the skyline meets the sea, and knows day ended and night begun, not thus that I recognized the end of my prosperity and the beginning of my disasters. That moment came later, as I shall record. It was rather that; as, in certain states of the weather, long before sunset one may be suddenly aware that afternoon is past and evening approaches; so, though I had no intimation at the moment, yet, reviewing my memories I realize that at that instant began the chain of trivial circumstances which led up to my calamity and enmeshed me in ruin.

And just here I cannot but remark, what I have often meditated over, how trifling, how apparently insignificant, are the circumstances which determine the felicity or misery

* A. D. 184. See Note C.

of human beings. I was possessed of an ample estate; I was, in most difficult conditions, in unruffled amity with all my neighbors, on both sides of the great feud, except only my hereditary enemy; I was high in the favor of the Emperor; I was in a fair way to marry the youngest, the most lovely and the richest widow in Rome. In the twinkling of an eye I was cast down from the pinnacle of good fortune into an abyss of adversity. And upon what did my catastrophe hinge? Upon the whims of a friend and upon one oversight of my secretary. I should have had no story to tell, I should have been a man continuously happy, affluent and at ease, early married and passing from one high office to the next higher in an uninterrupted progress of success, had it not entered the head of my capricious crony to pay me an unexpected and unannounced visit, had he not arrived precisely at the time at which he came, had he not encountered just the persons he met just where he did meet them, had not his prankishness hatched in him the vagary which led him to give quizzical replies to their questions; had I not, carried away by my elation at my prosperity and fine prospects, been a trifle too indulgent to my tenantry.

Even after, as a result, the nexus of circumstances had been woven about me and after I found myself embroiled with both my powerful neighbors, I should have escaped any evil consequences had not my secretary, than whom no man ever was more loyal to his master or more wary and inclusive in his foresight upon every conceivable eventuality, failed to forecast the possible effects of a minor omission.

When my story begins I had already had one small adventure, nothing much out of the ordinary. Agathemer and I were returning from my final inspection of my estate. As we rode past one of the farmsteads we heard cries for help. Reining up and turning into the barn-yard, we found the tenant himself being attacked by his bull. I dismounted and diverted the animal's attention. After the beast was securely penned up I was riding homewards more than a little tired, rumpled and heated and very eager for a bath.

As we approached my villa we saw a runner coming up

the road, a big Nubian in a fantastic livery which when he reached us turned to be entirely unknown to me. My grooms were just taking our horses. The grinning black, not a bit out of breath after his long run, saluted and addressed me.

"My master has sent me ahead to say he is coming to visit you."

"Who is your master?" I asked.

"My master," he said, still grinning goodnaturedly, "enjoined me not to tell you who he is."

I turned to Agathemer.

"What do you make of this?" I asked.

"There is but one man in Italy," he replied, "who is likely to send you such a message, and his name is on the tip of your tongue."

"And on the tip of yours, I'll wager," said I. "Both together now!"

I raised my finger and counted.

"One! Two! Three!"

Both together we uttered:

"Opsitius Tanno!"

There was no variation in the Nubian's non-committal grin. We went up the steps and stood by the balustrade of the terrace, where it commanded a good view of the valley. We could see a party approaching, a mounted intendant in advance, a litter, extra bearers and runners and several baggage mules.

"Nobody but Tanno would send me such a message," I said to Agathemer.

"No one else," he agreed, "but I should be no more surprised to see the Emperor himself in this part of the world."

"One of his wild whims," I conjectured. "Nothing else would tear him away from the city."

I meditated.

"Our arrangements for dinner," I continued, "fall in very well with his coming. I suppose the guest-rooms are all ready, but you had best go see to that, and meanwhile turn this fellow over to Ofatulenus."

Agathemer nodded. The pleasantest of his many good

qualities was that whatever he might be asked to do he carried out without comment or objection. Nothing was too big or too small for him. If he were asked to arrange for an interview with the Emperor or to attend to the creasing of a toga he was equally painstaking and obliging. He went off, followed by the negro. I waited on the terrace for Tanno. There was no use attempting to bathe until after his arrival. Presently a cheerful halloo from the litter reached my ears. It was Tanno to a certainty. Nobody else of my acquaintance had voice enough to make himself heard at that distance or was sufficiently lacking in dignity to emit a yawp in that fashion. When his escort came near enough I could see that all his bearers wore the same livery as his runner. Tanno was forever changing his liveries and each fresh invention he managed to make more fantastic than the last. There were eight bearers to the litter and some twenty reliefs. Travelling long distances by litter, begun as a necessity to such invalids as my uncle, had become a fashion through the extreme coxcombery of wealthy fops and the practice of the young Emperor. Tanno's litter had all its panels slid back, and the curtains were not drawn. He was sitting almost erect, propped up by countless down cushions. He greeted me with many waves of the hand and a smile as genial as his halloo. I went down a little from the terrace to meet him and walked a few paces beside the litter. He rolled out and embraced me cordially, appearing as glad to see me as I was delighted to see him.

"I do not know," I said, "whether I am more surprised or pleased to see you. To what do I owe my good fortune?"

"We simply cannot get on without you," he answered, "and I am going to take you back to Rome with me. How soon can you start?"

"You came at the nick of time," said I, "I had expected to go down three days from now, but I found out this afternoon that I can get away tomorrow morning."

"Praise be to Hercules and all the gods," said Tanno. "I love the country frantically, especially when I am in the city. I love it so that three days on the road is enough

country for me. I have been bored to death and do so want a bath."

"The bath is all hot and ready," said I, "and the slaves waiting. But I am giving a dinner this evening and nearly all my neighbors are coming. The diners are almost due to arrive, I need a bath and want one, but I meant to wait for my guests."

"Well," he said, "you have one guest here already and that's enough. Let's bathe once, at once, and you can bathe again when your Sabine clodhoppers get here. Life is too short for a man to get enough baths, anyhow. Two a day is never enough for me. A pretext for two in an afternoon is always welcome. Come on, let's bathe quick, so as to have it over with before the first of the other guests arrives, then we can get a breath of fresh air and be as keen for the second bath as for the first."

Conversation with Tanno consisted mostly in listening and interjecting questions. He wallowed in the cold tank like a porpoise; caught me and ducked me until I yelled for mercy, and while I was trying to get my breath, half drowned me with the water he splashed over me with both hands; talking incessantly, except when his head was under water. When we lay down on the divan in the warm room he rattled on.

"You needn't tell me," he said, "that your runners haven't taken letters to Vedia, but she is supposed not to hear from you, so, as I told of two of your letters to me, I have, in a way been held responsible for you and have been pelted with inquiries. Nemestronia loves you like a grandson, and, if you ask me, I say Vedia is in love with you out and out. As I had heard from you and nobody else had, I began to feel as if I ought to look after you. Everything was abominably humdrum and I deceived myself into thinking I should enjoy the smell of green fields. I certainly should have turned back less than half way if I had been concerned with anybody else than you; and when we turned off the Via Salaria into your country byroad I cursed you and your neighbors and all Sabinum. The most deserted stretch of road I ever

travelled in all my life. I saw only six human beings before I reached your villa and I had heard that this valley was populous and busy. I slept last night at Vicus Novus and I started this morning, bright and early. When we turned up the road below Villa Satronia I was never more disgusted in my life. My men are perfectly matched in height, weight, pace and action and any eight of the lot will carry me at full speed as smoothly as a pleasure-barge. But they could make nothing of that road. It is all washed, guttered, dusty in the open places, puddly where trees hang over it and full of loose stones on top everywhere.

"I was so horribly jolted that I called the bearers to stop. I made Dromanus get off his horse and give me his poncho and his big felt hat. Then I got on his horse and told him to get into the litter. He was embarrassed.

"'Pooh,' said I, 'you cannot walk and we should look like fools with an empty litter. Get in and be jounced! Draw the curtains; if we meet anybody I'll give you an impressive title.' He rolled in among the cushions, looking as foolish as possible. His horse ambled perfectly and I felt more comfortable. I went on ahead. We had not met anybody since we turned into the crossroads; about half a mile beyond the place where I had left my litter I came around one of the innumerable curves a little ahead of the procession and saw two men approaching on foot. When they came abreast of me they saluted me politely and the taller, a black-haired, dark-faced fellow with a broad jaw, inquired (in the tone he would have used to Dromanus) whose litter I was escorting. I was rather tickled that they took me for my own intendant. I judged we must be approaching the entrance to Villa Satronia and that they were people from there. I assumed an exaggerated imitation of Dromanus' most grandiloquent manner and in his orotund unctuous delivery I declaimed:

"'My master is Numerius Vedius Vindex. He is asleep.' (They swallowed that awful lie, they did not realize how bad their own road was.) 'We are on our way to Villa Vedia.'

"They looked sour enough at that, I promise you, and I

made out that they were Satronians for certain. The two fellows exchanged a glance, thanked me politely and went on.

"I knew the entrance to the Satronian estate by the six big chestnut-trees, you had often described them to me; and I knew the next private road by the single huge plane tree. But when we crossed the second bridge, the little one, I went over that round hill and did not recognize the foot of your road when we came to it. I was for going on. Dromanus called from behind the curtains of the litter:

" 'This is Hedulio's road: turn to the right.'

"I was stubborn and sang back at him:

" 'Hedulio has told me all about this country. This is not his land. It is further on at the next brook.'

"We went on over the next bridge past the entrance to the south, and I felt more and more that Dromanus was right and I was wrong, and yet I grew more and more stubborn. When we passed the sixth bridge and I saw the stream getting bigger and turning to the left, I knew I was wrong. At the crossroads I realized we were at the entrance to Villa Vedia, but I would not give up, I took the left-hand turn and went down stream. Beyond the first bend in the road we found ourselves approaching a long, straggling, one-street village of tall, narrow stone houses along the eastern bank of the little river. By the road, just before the first house, watching five goats, was a boy, a boy with a crooked twitching face.

" 'The village idiot,' I put in. 'They can never let him out of sight and he is always beside the road.'

"He was not too big an idiot to tell us it was Vediamnum."

"He was enough of an idiot," I said, "to forget you, and your question the next minute. The boy is almost a beast."

"He had enough sense to tell us the name of the village," Tanno retorted, "and I had to acknowledge to Dromanus he was right, and so we turned round. When we were hardly more than out of sight of Vediamnum we met another party, a respectable-looking man, much like a farm bailiff, on horseback, and two slaves afoot. I had not seen them before, and they, apparently, had not previously seen us.

The rider asked, very decently, whose was the party. I treated them as I had the others.

"'My master is asleep,' I said again. (It was not such an improbable lie that time, for the road by Vediamnum is pretty good.) 'I have the honor to escort Mamercus Satronius Sabinus.'

"I had guessed that they were Vedians and I was sure of it when I said that. The slaves scowled and the bailiff saluted very stiffly.

"Just after we turned into your road, I stopped the escort and told Dromanus to take his horse. He had relieved me of his hat and poncho and I had one hand on the litter, ready to climb in, when I heard hoofs behind us on the road. I looked back. There was a rider on a beautiful bay mare coming up at a smartish lope. Just as he came abreast of us she shied at the litter and reared and began to prance about. I give you my word I never had such a fright in my life. If you can imagine Commodus in an old weather-beaten, broad-brimmed hat of soft, undyed felt and a mean, cheap, shaggy poncho of undyed wool, and worse than the hat, that was the man on the mare. He was left-handed, too."

"How did you know that?" I asked.

"By the way he handled his reins, of course," said Tanno. "The mare was a magnificent beast, vicious as a fury, with a mouth as hard as an eighty-pound tunny. He sat her like Castor himself. She pirouetted back and forth across the road and my fellows scampered from under her hoofs. The mare was such a beauty I could not take my eyes off her."

"Yes," I put in, "Ducconius has a splendid stud."

"Was he Ducconius?" Tanno exclaimed. "Your adversary in your old law-suit?"

"His son Marcus, from your description," I amplified. "He is proprietor of the property now. His father died last year."

"Well," Tanno went on. "You know that look Commodus has, like a healthy, well-fed country proprietor with no education, no ideas and no thoughts beyond crops and deer-

hunting and boar-hunting, with a vacuous, unintelligent stare? Well, that was just the way he looked."

"That is the way young Ducconius looks," I rejoined. "He ought to. You have described exactly what he is."

"Does he know he looks like the Emperor?" Tanno asked, "and how does it happen?"

"Pure coincidence," said I. "The family have been reared in these hills for generations, none of them ever went to Rome. Reate is the end of the world for them."

"Well," Tanno commented, "he might be Commodus' twin brother, by his looks. He'll be a head shorter, in a hurry, if Commodus ever hears of him. He is the duplicate of him. I stood in the road, staring after him, and forgot to climb into the litter. When I woke up and climbed in, my lads swung up your road at a great pace, and here I am. If I had had any sense I'd have been here not much after noon. As it is I have wasted most of the day."

When we went into the hot room, I asked him,

"Where did you get your new bearers? They look to me like Nemestronia's. What have you done with your Saxons?"

"Nemestronia has them," he explained, "and my Nubians were hers. The dear old lady took a fancy to my Saxons and teased and wheedled until I agreed to exchange. Nobody ever can refuse anything to Nemestronia. I argued a good deal. I told her that even if she is the youngest-looking old lady in Rome it would never do in the world to set herself in contrast to such blue eyes and pink skins and such yellow hair: that Nubians were much more appropriate and that nothing could be more trying than Saxons, even for a bride. She told me I mustn't make fun of her old age and decrepitude. She said that the Saxons had such cheerful, bright faces and looked such infantile giants that she really must have them. So I let her have her way. The Nubians stand the heat better and the Saxons were almost too showy."

Even while the attendant was thumping and kneading him on the slab, Tanno went on talking a cheerful monologue of frothy gossip. I asked him about the Emperor.

"As fretful as possible," he said. "The trouble with Commodus is that he is growing tired of exhibiting himself as an athlete to invited audiences in the Palace. He is perfectly frantic to show himself off in the Circus or in the Amphitheatre. He oscillates between the determination to disregard convention and to do as he likes and virtuous resolutions, when he has been given a good talking-to by his old councillors and has made up his mind to behave properly. He will break out yet into public exhibitions of himself. He is really pathetically unhappy over his hard lot and positively wails about the amount of his time which is taken up with State business and about the pitifully small opportunity he has for training and exercise."

My bath was broken off, sooner than I had intended, by the appearance of one of the kitchen-boys, who asked for me so tragically and so urgently and was so positive that no one else would suffice, that I went down into the kitchen in a towering rage at being interrupted and wondering why on earth I could be needed. I found Ofatulena, wife of the Villa-farm bailiff, in violent altercation with my head-cook. He asserted that she had no business in his kitchen and must get out. Her contention was that she, as bailiff's wife, was above all slaves whatever, that she knew her place and that when a distinguished stranger visited the Villa she would show him what old-fashioned Sabine cooking was like, so she would. The cook had had, through Agathemer, my directions for a formal dinner and he declared that one more guest made no difference and that his dinner was good enough for anybody. I compromised by telling him to continue as he had planned, but to allow Ofatulena to prepare one dish for each course and to add to each one of her own. I was rather pleased at her intrusion, for there was no better cook in Sabinum, and anything old-fashioned was sure to be a novelty to Tanno.

I found Tanno on the terrace, basking comfortably in the late sunshine and gazing down the valley.

"What is that big hill away off to the East?" he asked.

"That is on the Aemilian property," I answered. "Villa Aemilia has a direct outlet to the Via Valeria and the Aemilian Estate does not belong to this neighborhood at all. It runs back to the Tolenus and mostly drains and slopes that way. Huge as the Vedian estates are, and though the Satronian estates are still huger, yet the Aemilian estates are so vast that they are larger than both the Vedian and Satronian lands together. The Aemilian land has much woodland along its western borders and blankets and almost encloses the Vedian and Satronian estates and all of us in between. The road you came up is a sort of detour east of the Salarian way. The Satronians and Vedians and we in between all use it, turning to the right towards Reate and to the left towards Rome."

Tanno blinked at the soft, hazy view and swept his arm southward.

"That is all Satronian over there?" he asked.

"All," I said, "as far as the Aemilian domain."

"Which way," he queried, "is Villa Vedia?"

"To see it from here," I said, "you would have to look straight through this house and half a dozen hills. It is almost due north."

"Vedians to the northward," he continued, "Satronians to the southward, and just you and Ducconius sandwiched in between, clapper-clawing each other."

"No, quite otherwise!" I retorted. "My property does not touch Vedian or Satronian land anywhere, and Ducconius has barely half a mile of boundary line along the Satronian domain. There are six other estates, the largest half as big as mine, the smallest not much bigger than the largest of my tenant-farms; three are on one side of me and three on the other. You will meet the proprietors at dinner, as I told you. They should be here now."

"Goggling country bumpkins?" he conjectured.

"Not a bit like that," I countered, "though you would scarcely call them cultured. There is no art connoisseur among them. They care little for books, but they are edu-

cated gentlemen and can talk of other subjects besides vine-growing and cattle breeding. They have all been to Rome, the Ducconians are the only stay-at-home, stick-in-the-mud family in this valley. You will find all your fellow-diners keenly interested in anything you can tell them about the latest fashions and the latest gossip from Rome. They think and talk of the doings of Rome's fast set much more than you do."

"They have nothing to do with the feud?" he queried.

"Three of them," I explained, "are on the Vedian side, three on the Satronian side, though they are always polite to each other. But it is a frigid politeness and I was anticipating the dinner tonight as a frightful trial. I fancy your presence will ensure its passing off comfortably. Entedius Hirnio will be here, too. His estates are beyond Vediamnum and he has never taken sides in the feud any more than Ducconius or my family."

"Do you ever see Ducconius?" he asked.

"Oh, never," said I, "we take care never to recognize each other, I assure you. We cannot help meeting occasionally, but I never see him and he never sees me. We meet mostly on the road. The lower part of this valley-road where he overtook you is as much his right-of-way as mine, up to where the road forks and is crossed by the Bran Brook. You can see the bridge from here."

Tanno shaded his eyes with his hand.

"That is all his land over there, on the other side of the Bran Brook," I continued. "Further up the valley the brook has three feeders. The Flour rises back of my land on the Vedian estate. The Chaff brook is all mine and the Bran rises in his woodlands."

"Will he appeal the case or reopen it now your uncle is dead?" Tanno queried.

"There is no possibility of appeal," I said, "or of reopening. The case is closed and I have won it forever. And all thanks to Agathemer. But for Agathemer, Ducconius would have won the final hearing as he had won all the intermediate appeals. His defeat after so many victories

has embittered him more than if we had won every time and he hates me worse than ever.

"The only unpleasant feature for me is that the tenant of the farm so long in dispute cannot be ousted. He was heart and soul with Ducconius all through the period of the suit. His daughter is married to one of Ducconius' tenants and his younger son has taken one of Ducconius' farms since three of his tenant-families died off year before last with the plague. This makes old Chryseros Philargyrus by no means a pleasant tenant for me."

"Old Love-Gold Love-Silver," Tanno commented, "is that a nickname or is it really his name?"

"Really his name," I affirmed. "His mother was so extravagant and wasteful that his father named him Chryseros Philargyrus as a sort of antidote incantation, in the hope that it might prove a good omen of his disposition and predispose him to parsimony. He certainly has turned out sufficiently close-fisted to justify the choice."

"I don't understand your talk about tenantry," said Tanno. "Do you mean you cannot change a bailiff on a farm which you have won incontestably on final appeal in a suit at law?"

"He is no bailiff," I answered him. "He is a free man just as much as you or I. Sabinum is not like Latium or Etruria or Campania, where the free tenantry has vanished, or like Bruttium or Spain, where there never was any free tenantry. The free tenantry have survived in Sabinum more completely than in any part of the world. I have only one bailiff here and he manages only the villa-farm with a very moderate gang of slaves under him. I do not own any more slaves on my estate. The slaves on the farms are all owned by my tenants and there are eight farms besides the villa-farm; counting Chryseros, there are nine tenant farmers. Each owns slaves enough to work his farms. All the estates about here are managed in that way: Aemilian, Vedian, Satronian, Entedian and all the rest, big or little. We are rather proud of the system and very proud of our tenants."

"It must be a fine system," Tanno sneered. "I have been

wondering what kept you away from Rome, I suppose it has been the beautifully smooth and marvellously easy working of your farm-tenant system."

"It works just as well as one slave-gang under one bailiff, if not better," I retorted, hotly.

"Oh, yes," Tanno drawled, "it works just as well as one slave-gang under one bailiff. That is why you have not had to inspect your estates in Bruttium, why you have not visited Bruttium at all, why you have not so much as thought of visiting Bruttium, whereas you have had to spend more than two months here in these fascinating wilds. You can trust your tenantry so completely that you only have to spend two months making sure they are not idling or cheating you: you can trust your Bruttian bailiff so poorly that you let him alone absolutely."

I was more than a little nettled by his ironical mood.

"I spent three months of the year out of the past four years in Bruttium," I argued. "I know every inch of the ranches perfectly. My uncle never allowed me to become acquainted with anything up here. I was his representative and factor in Bruttium. When I visited him here I was no more than a guest and I have had to learn all the workings of the estate from the beginning."

"Nonsense!" Tanno rejoined. "You know each when you see it. If the tenants pay their rent on time, what do you need to know about how they run their farms?"

"They pay cash and on time," I explained, "but the cash represents half the yield and each manages the sale of his own produce. It is necessary for the proprietor to understand the capacities of each farm."

"And you are proud of a tenantry," he sneered, "so honest that you cannot trust them not to swindle you out of your just dues and on whom you have to spy all the time to get what you should get from them."

"You do not understand," I declared.

"Right you are," said Tanno. "I do not and I do not want to."

"Just wait a moment and do not interrupt," I urged.

"You do not understand, there is no use in being a proprietor if you do not know more than your tenantry. There are a thousand, there are ten thousand details in which the management of the farms may be made more profitable or less profitable, and all these details have to be watched and must be well in the proprietor's mind."

"Could you not get some kind of overseeing general estate bailiff to do all that for you?" he suggested.

"I can," I said, "and I'm going to get one. My uncle's overseer died of the plague and my uncle was too old and too set in his ways to get another, so he acted as his own overseer for the last four years of his life. I must know of my own knowledge just how the place ought to be managed or I can never detect and forestall unnecessary and ruinous friction and trouble between my tenantry and any new superintending overseer."

"I do not know," Tanno ruminated, "which to admire more, the beauties of the Sabine tenant system or the wonders of the Sabine character. Any other man I know would have stayed in Rome and attended strictly to his courtship and let his estates take care of themselves. You are supposed to be violently in love and you certainly behave like it: yet you leave Rome and Vedia and shut yourself up among these damp cold hills and inspect and reinspect and make a final inspection, and delay for one last peep and linger for one final glance, where any other man would ignore the property and be with the widow."

"I do not see anything extraordinary about it," I disclaimed. "A man needs an income, a lover most of all."

"Income!" he snorted. "Isn't your income from your Bruttian estates ten times the gross return from the property?"

"More than ten times," I admitted.

"Why worry about it at all then?" he demanded. "Isn't your Bruttian income enough?"

"No income is enough," I declared, "if a man has a chance to get in more."

"Of course," he beamed, "you do not see anything ex-

traordinary in your petting this property. A Sabine would use up a year to get in a sesterce from a frog pond. You are a Sabine. All Sabines worship the Almighty Sesterce. But to anybody not a Sabine it is amazing to see a lover postponing prayers to Lord Cupid until he has finished the last detail of his ceremonial duties to Chief Cash, Greatest and Best."

CHAPTER II

A COUNTRY DINNER

JUST then Tanno caught sight of a horseman approaching up the valley. I looked where he pointed.

"That will be Entedius Hirnio," I said. "Of my dinner guests he lives furthest away and so he always comes in first to any festivity."

"How far beyond Vediamnum does he live?" Tanno enquired.

"On the other side of the Vedian lands," I explained. "His property is over the divide towards the Tolenus, in between Villa Vedia and Villa Aemilia."

Entedius it was, as I made sure, when he drew nearer, by his magnificent black mare. He covered the last hundred paces at a furious gallop, pulled up his snorting mare abruptly, and dismounted jauntily. Plainly, at first sight, he and Tanno liked each other. When I had introduced them they looked each other up and down appraisingly, Entedius appearing to relish Tanno's swarthy vigor, warm coloring and exuberant health as much as did Tanno his hard-muscled leanness and weather-beaten complexion.

"Are you any relation to Entedia Jucunda?" Tanno queried.

"Very distant," Hirnio replied, "very distant indeed: too far for us to call each other 'cousin.' When I am in Rome I always call on her; once in a while she invites me to one of her very big dinners; otherwise we never see each other."

Almost before they had exchanged greetings Mallius Vulso rounded the house from the east and then Neponius Pomplio from the west; after he had been presented, the two other Satronians, Bultius Seclator and Juventius Muso, cantered up, followed closely by Fisevius Rusco and Lisius Naepor, both adherents of the Vedian side of the feud.

As soon as the stable-boys had led off their horses we started bathwards, delayed a moment by the arrival of a slave of Entedius, on a mule, leading another heavily laden with two packs. We made a quick bath, with no loitering, and at once went in to dinner. My uncle had been to the last degree conservative and old-fashioned. He would have nothing to do with any new inventions, save his own. So he would not hear of any alterations in the furnishings of his villa, except those suggested by his ideas of sanitation. Otherwise it had been kept just as my grandfather had left it to him. In particular uncle could not be brought to like the newly popular C-shaped dining sofas, which all Rome and all fashionables all over Italy and the provinces had so acclaimed and so promptly adopted along with circular-topped dining-tables. My *triclinium* still held grandfather's square-topped table and the three square sofas about it. Uncle's will, in fact, had stipulated that no furnishings of the villa must be altered within five years of the date of his death. As I had to adjust my formal dinners to the old style, I was not only delighted to have Tanno with us for himself and for his jollity, but also because he just made up the nine diners demanded by ancient convention.

Agathemer had asked me, as a special favor, to leave the decoration of the *triclinium* entirely to him, and I had agreed, when he fairly begged me, not to enter the *triclinium* or even pass its door, after my noonday siesta. When I did enter it with my guests I was dazzled. The sun had just set and the northwestern sky was all a blaze of golden brightness, streaked with long pink and rosy streamers of cloud, from which the evening light, neither glaring nor dim, flooded through the big northwestern windows. The spacious room was a bower of bloom. Great armfuls of flowers hid the

capitals of the pilasters, others their bases; garlands—heavy, even corpulent garlands—were looped from pilaster to pilaster; every vase was filled with flowers, the little vases on the brackets, the big ones alternating with the statues in the niches, the huge floor-vases in the corners: the table, the sofas, the floor, all were strewn with smaller blossoms, tiny flowers or fresh petals of roses. The garlands for our heads, which were offered us heaped on a tray, were to the last degree exquisite. I adjusted mine as if in a dream. I was dazed. I knew that the flowers could not have been supplied by our gardens; I could not conjecture whence they came.

Agathemer, bowing and grinning, stood in the inner doorway. My eyes questioned his.

"I have a note here," he said, "which I was enjoined not to hand you until you had lain down to dinner."

The two second assistant waiter boys took our shoes and we disposed ourselves on the sofas, Tanno in the place of honor, I rejoicing again that his presence has solved, acceptably to all the rest, the otherwise insoluble problem of to whom I should accord that location.

Agathemer handed me the note. At sight of it I recognized the handwriting of Vedius Caspo. Of course, like my uncle before me, I always invited to any of my formal entertainments all my neighbors except Ducconius Furfur, our enemy, and the only neighbor with whom we were not on good terms. Equally, of course, Vedius Caspo at Villa Vedia and Satronius Dromo at Villa Satronia, regularly found some transparent pretext for declining my invitation, each fearing that, if he accepted, the other might by some prank of the gods of chance accept also, and they might encounter each other.

The thread was too strong for me to break. I tore it out of the seal, and, asking my guests' indulgence, I opened the note. It read:

"Vedius Caspo to his good friend Andivius Hedulio. If you are well I am well also. I was writing at Villa Vedia on the day before the Nones of June. I had written you some days before and explained my inability to avail myself

of your kind invitation to dinner on the Nones. I purposed sending you, with this, what flowers my gardens afford towards decorating your *triclinium* for your feast. I beg that you accept these as a token of my good will. When you reach Rome I beg that, at your leisure and convenience, you transmit my best wishes to my kinswoman, Vedia Venusta.

"Farewell."

This note staggered me more than the sight of the flowers. It was amazing that Vedius should have taken the trouble to be so gracious to me; that he should go out of his way to write me the vague and veiled, but unequivocal intimation of his approval of my suit for Vedia implied in the last sentences of his letter was astounding. Vedia had a very large property inherited from her father, from two aunts and from others of the Vedian clan. The whole clan was certain to be very jealous of her choice of a second husband. I had anticipated their united opposition to my suit. To be assured of his approbation by the beloved brother of the head of the clan made me certain that I should meet with no opposition at all.

My delight must have irradiated my face. Tanno, the irresistible, at once urged me to read the note aloud, saying:

"Don't be a hog. Don't keep all those good things to yourself. Let us have a share of the tid-bits. Read it out to all of us."

I yielded.

Of course the three Satronians looked sour. But Tanno knew how to smooth out any embarrassing situation. He beamed at me and fairly bubbled with glee.

"I bet on you," he said. "The widow will be yours at this rate. But don't show her that note till you two are married."

Before anybody else could speak he went on:

"I'm famished. So are we all. Flowers are fine to look at and to smell, but give me food. Let's get at our dinner."

We did. We fell upon the relishes, disposing of them with hardly the interchange of a word.

When the boys cleared the table I observed with some

pride that Tanno eyed with an expression of approval the table cloth and the big silver tray which they set on it, laden with the second course.

"You are," he said, "pretty well equipped for house-keeping in these remote wilds, Caius. Your table-cloth is far above the average for town tables and your tray is magnificent."

That started a round of talk on city usages, town etiquette and court gossip. Tanno, very naturally, did much of the talking, the rest mostly questioning and listening. He spoke at length of the Emperor, but of course more guardedly than while talking to me alone.

When the tray with the first course was removed and while that with the second course was being brought in the talk ebbed. Tanno gave it a turn, which at first seemed likely to prove unfortunate, by saying:

"Now I've told you the latest news from Rome and the current gossip and the popular fads. Turn about is fair play. It is time for some of you to tell me what just now most interests this country-side. My idea of country life is that it is about as exciting as the winter sleep of a dormouse or of a hibernating bear; but for all I know, it may be as lively in its way as life in town; you may be agog over some occurrence as important to you as a change of Palace Prefects would be at Rome. Speak out somebody, if there is anything worth telling."

"Whether it be worth telling I do not know," spoke up Bultius Seclator, "but the country-side hereabouts is agog just now over a recent case of abduction."

(I shuddered: here was the feud to the fore in spite of everything. And I shuddered yet more as I saw set and harden the features of Vulso, Rusco and Naepor.)

"To make clear to you," he went on, "I'll have to explain the circumstances. You undoubtedly know both Satronius Dromo of this valley and his father, Satronius Satro, at Rome. Satro's father, old Satronius Satronianus, among the horde of slaves set free by his will, liberated a number of artisans of various kinds, who, scattered about among the

neighboring towns and villages, had lived like free men, in dwellings belonging to him or in rented abodes, plying their trades and returning to their master a better income than he could have derived from their activities in any other way, since one of his assistant overseers saw to it that they paid in, unfailingly and promptly, the stipulated percentage of their gains. Among these was a cobbler named Turpio, at Trebula. He was so expert, so deft, so quick and so ingratiating to customers, that the overseer insisted on his paying a percentage of his earnings larger than that paid by any other similar slave. Now cobbling, at the best of it, is not an occupation at which one would fancy that anyone would become wealthy. Yet Turpio grew to be very well off. He early amassed savings enough to pay for his own freedom, but his master would not agree to that, so Turpio bought the house in which he lived and his workshop. In the course of time he accumulated possessions of no mean value and owned several slaves, whom he employed as assistant cobblers. By his master's will all that he had amassed became his property, of course, when he was freed. He was, as he is, very popular in Trebula and among all the country-folk round about who visit Trebula. He is esteemed by all who know him and by all Satronians of every degree.

"Now Turpio, some years ago, partly on account of his kind-heartedness, partly since he could never resist a bargain and he got her for almost nothing, partly, perhaps because of his canny foresight, bought a wretched, puny, sickly, little runt of a four-year-old slave-girl, a mere rack of bones covered with yellow skin. She continued sickly for some years, then, when she was more than half grown, the fresh air of Trebula, its good water, the kindness with which she was treated, the generous fare accorded her, all working together, suddenly began to show results. She plumped out, grew tall, vigorous, active, graceful and charming. She also acquired notable skill at weaving. His intimates congratulated Turpio on his luck or prescience and foretold for him notable profits from her sale. Turpio averred that he and his spouse were so fond of the girl that he was unwill-

ing to part with her except to a master or mistress whom she took to and who seemed likely to be kind to her. He refused several handsome offers for her. She became notable in Trebula as its most beautiful inhabitant and all who knew her wished her well.

"Not long ago, Vedius Molo of Concordia, not a bad specimen of a noble lad, I will say, came to Villa Vedia. He roamed about the country as a young nobleman will. By some chance he caught sight of Xantha, for that is her name, and, of course, like many another, fell in love with her. He promptly offered to buy her. But Xantha did not like him at all and Turpio, as always, consulted her before deciding to sell her. Opposition inflamed Molo and he bid Turpio up till his business instincts all but overcame his doting affection for Xantha. But Xantha liked Molo less and less the more she saw of him. She begged Turpio not to sell her to Molo. He was obdurate, although Molo bid on up till he was offering a really fabulous price, though one well within his means. He could not credit that Turpio would not yield. When he was convinced that he could not wheedle him he lost his temper. Turpio told him that the negotiations were at an end and warned him not to return. Molo went off in a rage.

"Two nights later Turpio's house was broken into by a considerable body of men, armed, certainly with clubs or staffs. Turpio and his household defended themselves vigorously and were all severely mishandled in the affray, Turpio most severely of all. They were overcome, even overwhelmed, and, before their neighbors could come to their assistance or the townsmen in general rally to help, Xantha was carried off by the intruders, who, beating the night watchman insensible, escaped through the postern of the north gate.

"This highhanded outrage has greatly incensed all Trebula and the entire neighborhood. The night was very dark, neither Turpio nor any of his household nor yet the watchman at the postern claims to have recognized any of the abductors. Yet all impute the outrage to Vedius Molo. Every magistrate is alert to punish the delinquents and to

return Xantha to her master. Yet she has totally vanished. After they passed the postern her abductors left no trace. Whether they had or had not with them a two-wheeled or a four-wheeled carriage or a litter or a sedan-chair cannot be determined; nor whether they were on foot or on horseback. The weather was dry and windy and the rocky roads out of Trebula showed no tracks of any kind. The country has been scoured in every direction and all persons questioned, not only at the change-stations on the main roads, and at crossroads, but at all villages. Not a clue has been found; though all Turpio's friends more than suspect Vedius Molo, there is not an iota of evidence on which anyone could base a demand for a warrant to search Villa Vedia or any other specified villa, farmstead or other piece of property. Xantha has vanished. There are rumors that she is at Villa Vedia, but they seem as baseless as the rumor of a party of horsemen conveying a closed litter, which rumor has radiated from uncountable localities all about here, not one of which localities could, when their inhabitants were questioned, substantiate the rumor in any way. Equally baseless appear the numerous rumors that this or that individual has it on unimpeachable authority that Xantha's abductors are camped somewhere in this or that woodland and are preparing to smuggle Xantha into Villa Vedia by that route which they deem least probable for such a venture and therefore least watched. With all this the country-side is agog, I can assure you."

"Fairly exciting, I admit," Tanno remarked when Bultius paused. "Sounds like the tales of goings-on in Latium in the days when the Aequi, Volsci and Hernici raided up to the gates of Rome four summers out of five. I had not thought Sabinum so primitive."

Before I could speak, Fisevius Rusco cut in.

"Bultius," he said, "Vulso and Naepor and I have listened without any interruptions to your version of the occurrences you have narrated, and I must say you have told them as fairly as could be expected from any one with your leanings. I have no remarks to make on your story nor anything to

say in rebuttal. But it seems to me, it is now your turn, along with Nepronius and Juventius, to listen with equal patience, while I narrate a similar story."

The three Satronians bowed stiffly and in silence.

Rusco resumed, addressing Tanno:

"I shall not," he said, "be compelled to go into details as minutely as did Bultius. You can comprehend my story with less background.

"At Reate, for some years past, there lived a worthy couple, freedman and freedwoman of Vedius Vindex. The husband died more than a year ago, leaving a young and childless widow, named Greia Posis, possessed of a good town-house and of three small farms not far out in the country. Naturally as she was comely and well-off, Greia soon had suitors aplenty. For some time she showed no favor to any, but lately it has been plain that she would marry either Helvidius Flaccus, a tenant-farmer holding his land under one of the Vedian clan near Reate, or Annius Largus, similarly a tenant of one of the Satronian properties. Although Helvidius was on Greia's side of our local feud, while Annius was on the other, idlers at Reate were laying wagers that Annius would win Greia, considering him most in her favor.

"Recently, however, Greia had some sort of a quarrel with Annius, and announced her intention of marrying Helvidius.

"You must understand that Greia has the best sort of reputation, is universally respected, and is greatly liked by all her neighbors and acquaintances and is popular in Reate.

"Now, a day or two after the abduction which Bultius has narrated, Greia had visited one of her farms and, towards dark, was returning home to Reate in a two-wheeled gig driven by a slave of hers, a deaf-mute lad. What occurred can only be conjectured, as the deaf-mute cannot relate it, but, at all events, he was found insensible, bruised and bleeding, by the road, apparently having been unmercifully beaten. Not far from him the mule was grazing by the roadside, his harness in perfect condition and the gig unharmed. Greia, however, had vanished. No one had seen Annius in the neighborhood, yet it is generally assumed that he managed

to abduct Greia in broad daylight without any one sighting him either coming or going: which, if the fact, would be an almost miraculous feat.

"Certainly Greia has disappeared. The magistrates of Reate searched Annius' farmstead, but found neither Greia nor, indeed, any trace of Annius himself. It is conjectured that he is hiding, with Greia, at some farm or villa under the Satronian protection. But there is no shadow of any tangible basis for the conjecture, nor for the rumors, which, like those concerning Xantha which Bultius had told you of, run all over the country-side; very similar rumors, too; for some are to the effect that Annius is holding Greia in durance at Villa Satronia; others that a cortege of horsemen escorting a closed litter has been seen here or there on some road; others that someone has learnt that Annius is about to attempt to reach Villa Satronia with Greia, convoyed by an escort of his clansmen. The country-side buzzes with such whispers.

"And let me point out to you, what you undoubtedly comprehend, that serious as is the forcible abduction of a slave-girl, the abduction of a freewoman, even if a freedwoman, is a far more serious matter. Not only is Helvidius on fire to reclaim his bride and to revenge himself on Largus, not only are all his relations, friends and well-wishers eager to assist him by every means in their power, not only are all right-thinking men incensed at the outrage, but the magistrates of Reate are determined to bring the guilty man to justice and to free Greia."

Pomplio paused.

"Very well told," was Tanno's comment, "and I comprehend far better than you perhaps imagine. Not only are the magistrates of Reate hot on the trail of Annius and those of Trebula equally keen after Vedius Molo, but all Vedians are eager to shield Molo and to help catch and convict Annius Largus, and all Satronians conversely doing all they can to shield Largus and get Molo. Oh, I twig! Moreover I realize that all Vedians regard the abduction of Greia as not so much a hot-headed folly of Largus as a Satronian retort to

the abduction of Xantha; and conversely, all Satronians regard it as merely an insufficient counter to Xantha's abduction. Oh, I comprehend the feud atmosphere. I have no doubt that scores of poniards of the Vedian clan are sharp and daily sharpened sharper, for use on Largus and as many Satronian dirks for use on Molo; that every road hereabouts has watchers posted along it; that bands of lusty lads are camped here and there waiting summonses or are actually in likely ambushes by the roadsides. I foresee shindies of great amplitude. You need not say any more; neither of you need say any more; none of you need say any more. In fact, I beg that the whole subject be dropped right here. I comprehend the feud atmosphere and I don't want any more of it in this *triclinium*. Let's forget or ignore the feud and enjoy Hedulio's good fare."

His compelling personality exerted its magic, as usual. All six feudists relaxed. I could feel the social tension dissolve. We all felt relieved.

By that time we had disposed of the fish and roasts, the boys had lighted the hanging lamps and the standing lamps, had removed the tray with what we had left of the roasts and had brought in the third-course tray with the birds and salads. As we sampled them Tanno remarked:

"You have a cook, astonishingly good, Caius, for anywhere outside of Rome and amazingly good for a villa in the hills, far from a town. I must see your cook and question him. His roasts, his broiled, baked and fried dishes are above the averages, yet nothing wonderful. But his ragouts or fricassees or whatever you call them, are marvellous. This salmi of fig-peckers (or of some similar bird, for it is so ingeniously flavored and spiced, that I cannot be sure) is miraculous. There was a sort of chowder, too, of what fish I could not conjecture, which was so appetizing that I could have gorged on it. Just as provocative and alluring was one of the concoctions of the second course, apparently of lamb or kid, but indubitably a masterpiece. I certainly must see your cook."

"My cook," I confessed, "was not the artist of the dishes

you praise so highly. Hereabouts we do not give them such high-sounding names as you apply to them, we call them hashes or stews. Ofatulena, the wife of my villa-farm bailiff, devised them and prepared them. She is famous hereabouts for her cooking."

"What," cried Tanno, "a woman cook! Never saw a woman cook, never heard of one, never read of one. Egypt, Babylonia, Lydia, Persia, Greece and Italy, all cooks have always been men. I ought to know all about cookery, what with my library on cookery and my travels to all the cities famous for cookery. But you have taught me something novel and wholly unsuspected. Trot out your female cook. Let's have a look at her."

I sent for Ofatulena and she came in, pleased and embarrassed, flushed brick-red all over her full moon of a face, diffident and elated, trembling and giggling.

Tanno questioned her and satisfied himself that she had prepared the dishes which had won his approbation and also that she was no hit-or-miss cook, but a real artist in the kitchen and really knew what she was doing.

"Beware, Hedulio," he said as he dismissed her. "You Sabines will have three abductions to gossip over if you do not look out. I'm half tempted now to suborn some of the riff-raff of the Subura to kidnap this miracle-worker of yours and hale her to Rome into my kitchen to amaze my guests."

When she was gone he resumed:

"Everything is topsy turvy in Sabinum, woman cooks and tenant farmers! What next? I gather that all of you, Satronians, Vedians and outsiders, have your estates parcelled out among free tenant farmers. Am I right?"

Hirnio, Seclator and the rest assured him that he was right.

"Well, then," he said, "tenant farming must be a subject perfectly safe for all persons present. Let's talk about it. Hedulio has tried to expound to me the beauties of the system, but he had no great success. I fail so far, to comprehend how the institution ever came into existence, why it

has maintained itself only in Sabinum and what are its advantages. Tell me about it."

Tanno had hit upon one of the few subjects on which all present felt concordantly. His utterance started a hubbub, all my guests talking at once, each trying to out-talk all the others and all voicing our local enthusiasm for our local farm-system. The *triclinium* rang with pæans of praise of our Sabine yeomanry, and when the excitement had abated enough to permit of intelligible discourse, Tanno was regaled with a series of tales illustrating the sterling worth of the Sabine yeomen, their knowledge of farming, their diligence, their patience, their unflagging energy, their parsimony, their amazing productivity in respect to crop-yield, stock, implements and all things raised or made on their farms, their devotion to their landlords, the charm of the ties between the gentry and the yeomanry and the universal Sabine cult of the tenant system.

With all this talk we lingered longer than usual over Ofatulena's bewitching salads, which Tanno lauded even above her ragouts.

When it was time for the last course, after the service-boys had slid the third-course tray off the table, I was amazed to see my four strongest table slaves enter fairly staggering under the load put upon them by Grandfather's biggest dinner-tray heaped with fruit, among which I descried African pomegranates and other exotics. Still more was I amazed when other slaves crowded in behind them, carrying baskets of hot-house melons of astonishing size and insistent perfume. Last of the procession was Agathemer, who stood in the doorway, grinning and beaming.

Tanno, not less than the guests in chorus, acclaimed this unexpected profusion.

Again I looked interrogatively at Agathemer. He responded as at the commencement of our meal.

"I have a note here," he said, "which I was enjoined not to hand you until after this fruit had been set upon your table."

He handed me the missive, the superscription of which

was, to my astonishment, in the handwriting of Satronius Dromo. While my fingers tugged at the thread, Tanno commanded:

"Read it out loud at once, like the other. No secrets here. Let us all in."

The letter began with all the traditional polite formalities, as had that from Vedius. It read:

"Satronius Dromo to his valued friend Andivius Hedulio. If you are well I am well also. I was writing at Villa Satronia on the day before the Nones of June. Some days before I had written you expressing my regret at the circumstances which prevented me from accepting your most welcome invitation to dine with you on the Nones. I intended dispatching to you, with this, what fruit my establishment has fit for your acceptance, which I ask of you, this fruit being sent as an earnest of my cordiality. When you are settled at Rome I beg that, when perfectly convenient to you, you convey my warmest regards to my cousin's widow, Vedia Venusta.

"Farewell."

At this letter I was fairly thunderstruck. That Satronius should take any notice of me at all was more amazing than the graciousness of Vedius. That he should have ransacked the provinces and overstrained the capabilities of rowers and horseflesh to send me costly rarities out of season was astounding. That his last sentence should practically duplicate the last sentence of the letter from Vedius was most incredible of all. For if all Vedians were sure to be very decidedly hypercritical as to anyone likely to become Vedia's second husband, it was still more a certainty that the entire Satronian connection would scrutinize minutely everything concerning any man likely to come into control of the great properties which she had inherited from her husband, Satronius Patavinus. That I should be disfavored by the entire Satronian connection had seemed to me more than likely. Dromo's intimation of his warm approval of my suit for Vedia, coming on top of Caspo's, cleared of all obstacles my

path towards matrimony with the woman of my heart's choice. I was more than elated, I was drunk with ecstacy.

After I had finished reading, dead silence reigned in the *triclinium*; even Tanno was too dumbfounded to utter any sound.

Hirnio spoke first.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I beg of you to hear me out with attention. Like our Caius here and like his hereditary antagonist, Ducconius Furfur, I have never taken sides in our age-long local feud. Like all outsiders and like a majority of its partisans, I have grieved at its existence, deplored its unfortunate results and hoped for its extinction. I think I may say with truth that there was not one inhabitant of this neighborhood who did not rejoice when the heads of the two families, with the abolition of the feud and the creation of the permanent amity in view, arranged a marriage between the lovely daughter of the head of the northern branch of the Vedian House and the son of the northern branch of the Satronian House. Satronian or Vedian; freeman or slave, everyone was delighted at the prospect of lasting harmony. The sudden death of Satronius Patavinus not only blasted these hopes, but intensified antagonisms; for all the Vedians felt that a daughter of the clan had been sacrificed in vain and all Satronians regretted that vast properties about Padua, long possessed by Satronians, passed by the will of her husband to a young widow, born of the Vedian House. All saw the prospect of exacerbated enmities and their probable results.

"Now it must be apparent to you that the two letters which we have heard read would never have been written without their writers having consulted with the heads of their respective houses. These letters are an intimation to our Caius that both her kinsmen and the kinsmen of her first husband smile upon his suit for the most lovely, the most charming and the wealthiest widow in Rome. This means, to a certainty, that both Satronius Satro and Vedius Vedianus descry the possibility that Vedia's union with a second husband acceptable to both clans and opposed to

neither may work for mitigation of the feud spirit and for establishment of harmonious amity almost as powerfully as would have the permanency of her membership of the Satronian clan. I conceive that all of us, outsiders and partisans, may congratulate Caius without reservation or afterthought, heartily and enthusiastically."

To this all present agreed in chorus, all drank my health.

Vulso, rather hesitatingly, spoke next.

"As all we say here," he began, "is under the rose and will not be repeated or hinted at, I do not mind saying that I feel as does Hirnio."

To this Rusco and Naepor agreed, with less hesitancy.

Similarly the three Satronians expressed their concurrence.

Again they all congratulated me on my luck, drank to the success of my suit, and to my prosperity and health.

Complete harmony reigned and the strained social atmosphere attending a dinner in the feud area vanished completely.

By this time the moon, which was nearly full, was high enough to bathe the world with silvery light. Tanno peering across the table and through the windows, remarked:

"You have a fine prospect, Caius. I admired it when I first lay down, but our interest in the flowers and in your letter from Vedius diverted my intention to speak of it. It is a charming outlook even by moonlight."

"Yes," I admitted, with not a little pride. "Grandfather, of course, dined earlier than is fashionable nowadays. He built this *triclinium* so that he could bask in the rays of the declining sun and could watch the sunset colors as they varied and deepened. My uncle used to dine as early as his father and, even in the hottest weather, enjoyed the direct rays of the sun on him as he dined, for he was always rheumatic and chilly, yet he enjoyed the beauty of the view even more."

"It is charming even by moonlight," Tanno repeated, "and that although the villa is between our outlook and the moon, so its shadow darkens the nearer prospect."

We all contemplated the view through the window.

"Who are those men I see just beyond the shadow of the house?" Tanno queried. "Quite an assemblage, it seems to me; almost a mob for these lonely districts."

I looked where he indicated and could not conjecture what it was that I saw.

CHAPTER III

TENANTRY AND SLAVERY

AGATHEMER came in and explained that my tenants had a petition to present to me and had gathered, hoping that I would receive them after dinner. (Doubtless, I thought, conjecturing that I would be, just after dinner, in the most accommodating humor possible.)

"I must see this and hear what they have to say," Tanno declared. "Have you any objections to our going with you, Caius?" he asked.

On my saying that I should be glad to have him come along, he said:

"Come on, all of you, it will be fun, and standing out in the night cool will freshen our zest for our wine."

All nine of us went out on the terrace. The prospect was indeed beautiful, only the brighter stars showing in the pale sky, the far hills outlined against it, the nearer hills darkly glimmering in the moon-rays, the valleys all full of pearly moonlit haze, the pleasance about the villa vague in the witchery of the moon's full radiance.

In that full radiance, on the path below the balustrade of the terrace, were my nine tenant farmers. Not one, as was natural among our healthy hills, but was my elder. Yet, according to our customary mode of address from master to tenant, I said to them:

"What brings you here, lads, so long after your habitual bed-time?"

Ligo Atrior acted as spokesman.

"We have a request to prefer," he said, "and we judged this an opportune time."

"Speak out," I said, "our wine is waiting for me and my guests, and I am listening. Speak out!"

He set forth, at considerable length and with many halts and repetitions, that all their farms were in excellent order and in an exceedingly forward condition, promising very well for the future in all respects; that I had just assured myself of all this by a minute inspection; that they were keenly emulous of each other and each thought his farm the best of the nine; that they were and had been very curious to learn which of the nine farms I thought the best kept; that someone had suggested that, if I judged any one of the nine distinctly better than his fellows', it would be proper to distinguish the man of my choice by some gift, bonus, exemption or privilege, if his farm was really the best kept; that while discussing these matters someone had remarked that he envied me my approaching visit to Rome, as he had never been there; that this had brought to their notice that not one of them had ever seen Rome, though it was less than three days' journey away; that someone had suggested that perhaps I might be induced not only to specify which of them I considered the best farmer, but to indicate my preference by allowing the best of them to visit Rome later in the summer, after the crops were all harvested; that they had agreed to abide loyally by my choice and that they prayed me to declare which of them, in my opinion, was the best farmer.

When Ligo paused, old Chryseros Philargyrus, his wiry leanness manifest even in the moonlight, although he was well muffled up against the dampness of the night, pushed himself to the front and said that he claimed that, in any such competition, he ought to stand on a level with my eight other tenants, even if they had been life-long tenants of the estate, whereas he, like his father and grandfather, had paid rent to Ducconius Furfur. He claimed that the court decision by which Ducconius had had to refund to my uncle all the rents received from the farm in dispute since the

first decision of the lowest court had awarded it to a Ducconius had been, in effect, an affirmation that his ancestors and he had always been, constructively, tenants of the Andivian estate.

The old man spoke well and tersely, made his points neatly and stated his arguments lucidly, and, in conclusion he said:

"And you must realize, Sir, that whatever my feelings have been up to today, after what happened this afternoon I have forgotten that I or mine ever owned Ducconius Furfur as master. I am your man henceforward, body and soul; I call you not only patron but savior and father. I make my plea for treatment putting me on full equality with my fellows, and I value myself so highly that I hope for the prize. Yet if I am not the lucky man, I shall loyally and in silence abide by your decision."

I was pleased with his words and I admitted the correctness of his contentions, but rebuked him for his self-assertive manner.

Then Ligo spoke again.

"Please publish your opinion, Master, for we are sleepy and long to be abed. But much more do we long for your decision, for each one of us considers himself a better farmer than any other and expects to be the chosen man."

I smiled.

"Suppose," I said, "that I am of the opinion that no one of you is better than all his fellows, but that two of you are better than the other seven, but equal to each other in merit?"

Ligo stood at loss, but old Chryseros spoke out at once, saying:

"In that case, Master, it would be proper that both men go to Rome, as such a prize could not be divided into shares."

His forwardness angered me. I told him sharply to mind his manners and to keep his place; that Ligo had been chosen spokesman and that he was to hold his peace. I also pointed out that I had not agreed to give any such prize

for distinguished excellence, that far less had I agreed that a visit to Rome should be the prize.

All nine of them stood mute.

I was tingling with my elation over my prospects of winning Vedia, for I felt sure of her personal favor, and the two notes from my great neighbors had thrown me into a sort of trance of rapture. I was genuinely pleased with the frugality, diligence and skill of my tenants. My estate was in a way to return far more than I had expected of it. I was in a position to be liberal, I felt indulgent.

"Lads," I cried, "everyone of the nine of you is as good a farmer as everyone of the other eight. You are the nine best farmers in Sabinum. You are such good farmers that you have put your farms in a state where your bailiffs can oversee the harvest as well as if under your own eyes. Everyone of you has earned a visit to Rome and everyone of you shall have it, and not at some future time, which may never come, but now. I start for Rome at daybreak and the whole nine of you shall go with me!"

This unexpected liberality they heard in silence: they stood dumb and motionless.

All but Philargyrus. Gesticulating, he pressed forward among them from where he had retired to the rear after my late rebuke. Gesticulating, his voice rising into a senile scream, he upbraided me for folly, extravagance, unthrift and prodigality. He declared that such indulgence would ruin me, would debauch him and his fellows and would, by its evil example, infect, corrupt and deprave the whole countryside. He railed at me. He vowed that, whatever the rest might do, he would use all his powers of persuasion to urge them to stick to their farms till harvest was over and he swore that he himself would, under no circumstances, leave his till the last ear of grain, the last root, the last fruit, was garnered, stored and safe for the winter.

I let him shriek himself hoarse and talk himself mute; then I spoke calmly and sternly:

"I am master here and master of all of you. The loyalty

due from a free tenant is, in Sabinum, as mandatory a bond as the obedience legally due from a slave. I speak. Listen, all of you. I set out for Rome at dawn. See that every man of the nine of you is on horseback at the east courtyard gate at dawn, with an ample pack of all things needed for a month's absence properly girthed on a led mule. If any of you dare to disobey I shall find some effective means to make him smart for his temerity."

Ligo, finding his voice, thanked me for the nine, and they trudged away.

When we were back again on the dining-sofas Tanno, as was his habit, took charge of things after his breezy fashion.

"With the permission of our Caius," he said, without asking my permission, of which he was sure, "I appoint myself King of the Revels. Where's the head butler?"

When my major-domo came forward, Tanno queried:

"How much water did you mix with the wine we've been drinking with our dinner?"

The butler replied:

"Two measures of water to one of wine."

Tanno nodded to me, smiling.

"You've mighty good wine, Caius," he said. "No one is more an expert than I and I should have conjectured three to two."

"Lads," he continued, to the guests collectively, "this is the sort of master-of-the-revels I am. I mean to start for Rome at dawn with Caius and I intend that both of us shall start cold sober. Therefore all of us must go to bed reasonably sober. You must submit to my rulings."

Then he instructed the butler:

"Give us no more of the mixture we have been drinking. Mix a big bowl three to one and ladle that out to us."

When our goblets had been filled he spoke to me!

"Caius, I want to know what that old hunks of a Chryseros Philargyrus meant when he said that after what had occurred this afternoon he was your man, body and soul. What happened."

"Nothing much." I said. "As Agathemer and I were

riding home and were passing his barn-yard gate, we heard yells for help. I dismounted and ran in. I found Chryseros rather at a disadvantage in handling a bull. I helped him get the beast into his pen. His gratitude seems exaggerated."

"Not any more exaggerated than your modesty," spoke up Neponius Pomplio, who had hardly uttered a word since he arrived. Turning to Tanno he continued:

"You'll never get Hedulio to tell you anything more definite than the very vague and hazy adumbration of his exploit he has already given. I heard some rumors of his feat as I rode down here from my house. I conjecture that the story is worth telling, to its least detail. If you want to hear what really occurred, call in Agathemer; he was with Hedulio when it happened."

"Good idea," said Tanno, "and I want Agathemer here for another reason. May I call him in, Caius?"

I assented and Agathemer came in, as smiling and obsequious as always.

"Agathemer," Tanno queried, "have you finished your dinner?"

"Long ago," said Agathemer, "and plenty too."

"Then have a chair," said Tanno, rolling himself luxuriously on the deep, soft mattress of one of my uncle's superlatively comfortable sofas. "No!" he said sharply. "No demurring. Sit down, man! Do as I tell you! I've a batch of questions to put to you and you'll be long answering me. I want you entirely at ease while you talk. You can't talk as I want you to unless you forget everything else. If you stand you'll be thinking of your tired legs instead of talking without thinking at all."

Agathemer, embarrassed, seated himself in the lowest and simplest chair in the room.

"We called you in for something else," said Tanno, "but first of all I want to ask you why you were not with us at dinner? Caius has written me again and again how he and you dine together evening after evening and how you are so entertaining that he enjoys a dinner just with you

almost as much as if he has novel guests. Why were you left out of this? Is Hedulio shy of more or less than nine at table, like his uncle, or does his uncle's dining-room oufit coerce him? Or what *was* the reason?"

Agathemer turned red and visibly writhed, mute and sweating.

I cut in.

"Here, Caius," I said to Tanno, "this isn't the torture chamber nor you the executioner, nor yet has Agathemer deserved the rack. You are putting him in an excruciating dilemma. He is too courteous to tell you that you ought to ask me, not him, and he is too loyal to tell you the reason."

I was nearer to being angry with Tanno than I had ever been in our lives. I comprehended why he, with all his superlative equipment of tact and intuition, had blundered; he could not but assume that circumstances were as they should have been rather than as they were; yet the blunder was, in a sense, unforgivable, and had created a social situation than which nothing could be more awkward.

Agathemer's face cleared as I spoke.

Tanno rounded on me.

"You tell me, then!" he said. "I guess from their faces that I have advertised my ignorance of what is perfectly well known to everybody else here. Remove my disabilities."

I hesitated and then went in with a rush.

"It does not matter a particle," I said, "how often I lie down to dinner with Agathemer when we are alone. Since I am then the only freeman in the villa there are no witnesses of our dining together. But if I have him to dinner with any guest he becomes thereby a freeman, as you very well know. And if I were free to set him free and chose to free him in that fashion, I should have to advise my friends in advance of my intentions and ask whether they were willing to lend themselves to such a proceeding. One cannot invite a man without previous explanation and then, when he's already in one's house, ask him to lie down to dinner with a slave."

"Slave!" Tanno roared at me, his face red as the back of a boiled lobster. If I had just missed being angry with him, there was no doubt that he was in a tearing fury with me.

"Slave?" he repeated. "Agathemer still a slave? Are you joking or are you serious? Is this true?"

"Entirely and literally true." I affirmed.

Tanno, so red that I should have thought it impossible that he could grow redder, grew redder.

"If your uncle," he roared, "did not free him in his will he was a hog. If you haven't freed him yourself, you're a hog. Free him here and now! Show some decency and some gratitude! Better late than never. Here, Agathemer, get off that boy's stool and lie down between me and Entedius."

"Go slow, Caius!" I admonished him. "You just confessed that you know nothing of the circumstances, yet you give orders in my house, orders affecting my property-rights, without first acquainting yourself with all the conditions on which such orders should be based, even if you had asked and received my permission to issue them."

Tanno was impulsive, even headlong, but he never wrangled or quarrelled and seldom lost his temper. I had feared a still more violent outburst from him, but my admonition brought him to himself.

"I apologize," he said, the red fading from his face. "Tell me the whole matter, so that I may comprehend. I'll listen in silence."

"The vital fact," I said, "is that, although I fully expected my uncle, in his will, to free Agathemer, he not only did not free him, but he enjoined me not to free him within five years after my entrance into my inheritance."

"Well," said Tanno, "I take back what I said of you when I called you a hog, but, even if we are taught to utter nothing but good of the dead, I repeat that your uncle was a hog. What do you think of it, Agathemer?"

Agathemer sat at ease now on his stool and his face was placid.

"Since you have asked what I think," he said, "may I

assume that you accord me permission to utter what I think, as if I were even a free man?"

"Utter precisely what you think, without any reservations or modifications," said Tanno. "I want to have exactly what you think and all you think."

"I think," spoke Agathemer, "that you are neither wise to speak so of the dead nor justified in speaking so of my former master. He was a just man and a wise man. Though I cannot conjecture his reason, I am sure that what he did was, somehow, for the best."

Tanno stared at him with a puzzled expression.

He turned to me.

"Isn't it true," he queried, "that your uncle had on his hands an hereditary lawsuit of the most exasperating sort, in the course of which the other side had won the first decision and every appeal?"

"Everybody knows that, Socrates," I admitted.

"Didn't Agathemer," Tanno pressed me, "just before the case was heard in the highest court, make a suggestion which your uncle's lawyers utilized and through which they won the case?"

"That is also true," I affirmed.

"Didn't they all say, that Agathemer's suggestion was just what they should have thought of at the very first and didn't they admit that they had not thought of it until Agathemer suggested it and that they never would have thought of it if he had not suggested it?"

"Those are the facts," I confessed.

"In view of those facts," Tanno continued, "what did you yourself expect your uncle to do for Agathemer in his will?"

I ruminated.

"The very least I anticipated," I said, "was that he would free Agathemer and make him a present equal to the value of half the property in dispute in the lawsuit. As Ducconius had had to repay to my uncle the full amount of the rents paid since his family first gained possession of the property, that would have been a very moderate reward for Agathemer's service. I also conjectured that he might free

Agathemer and will him a sum equivalent to the net proceeds of the repaid rents, less the costs of the suit. I should not have been surprised if he had made him a present of the whole farm out and out. Many an owner has done more for a slave who had done less for him."

"And you would have regarded it as fair if your uncle had taken any of those methods of recompensing Agathemer?"

"Certainly!" I affirmed.

"Then why, in the name of Mercury," he demanded, "didn't you free Agathemer the moment the will was read?"

"I have told you over and over," I retorted impatiently, "that my uncle's will enjoined me not to free Agathemer within five years, though he also enjoined that I was to make a new will at once so as to leave Agathemer free and recompensed if I died before the five years elapsed."

"But the injunction was not binding," Tanno persisted, "either in law or by religious custom. No dead man can prevent his heirs freeing slaves he leaves them. Why heed the injunction?"

"I could not contravene so explicit a behest of the dead," I demurred, "especially of a man I loved and revered. And you must recall my uncle's queer habit of acting on intuitions and the way he expressed them, always saying:

"'It has been revealed to me that. . . .' And his intuitions always seemed to amount to prevision, he never seemed to have acted amiss, however eccentric his act, however baseless his premonition. I have a feeling that in Agathemer's case he acted on some such presentiment."

Tanno turned to Agathemer.

"Do you feel that way too?" he demanded.

"I most certainly do," said Agathemer, "I have a feeling that my remaining a slave is going to be of vital service to Hedulio, somehow, sometime."

"Then you are content to remain a slave?" Tanno queried.

"No one wants to remain a slave," Agathemer confessed, "and every slave longs to be a free man and is impatient to be free at once. But I try to be resigned, of course, and,

except that I cannot rejoice in not being free, I am as well fed, clothed and housed as I should be as a free man and have as much leisure."

Tanno glowered at both of us.

I cut in:

"You must remember that Agathemer was raised almost as a free man and almost as my brother. We slept and played together from the time we could walk. We had the same tutors, always, when in the country, both in Bruttium and in Sabinum. In Rome, while I was at school, Agathemer was taught the same subjects at home. We love each other almost as brothers. Both of us were amazed when grandfather left Agathemer to my Uncle instead of to my father or to me. We were more amazed at Uncle's will. But as things are between us, Agathemer not only looks forward to freedom and an estate within five years, but knows that his interval of waiting will be pleasant, as pleasant as I can make it."

"But," Tanno objected, "think of the danger he is in while a slave. For instance, just suppose—(may the gods avert the omen)—that you were murdered in your bed this very night and no clue to the murderer found. Nothing could save Agathemer from being tortured along with all your other slaves."

"Pooh!" I cried. "You are behind the times! You may be an unsurpassable expert on dress and manners, on perfumery and jewels, but you could know more law. All those ferocious old statutes have been abolished by the enactments of Antoninus and Aurelius. A slave, during good behavior, is almost as safe as a freedman."

"It is you," Tanno countered, "who are behind the times. Commodus has had rescinded every edict ameliorating the condition of slaves promulgated since the accession of Trajan. As Nerva did little for them the status of slaves is now practically what it was at the death of Domitian."

"Anyhow," spoke up Agathemer, "whatever real or fancied perils hang over me, by my late master's will and wish, a slave I am and a slave I remain till the five years elapse."

Even thereafter I shall be Hedulio's devoted servitor, meanwhile I am his devoted slave."

"Does being his slave inhibit you from telling the truth about him?" Tanno queried.

"If it is to his discredit, certainly," Agathemer answered.

"Suppose it is to his credit, very much to his credit," Tanno pursued.

"Then I am permitted to tell the truth," laughed Agathemer.

"Then," said Tanno, "tell us the whole truth about Hedulio and Chryseros Philargyrus and the bull."

Agathemer laughed out loud.

"Delighted to oblige you," he bowed.

Tanno looked at me.

"Hedulio is blushing," he said, "this promises to be interesting. As king of the revels I forbid Hedulio from interrupting. Everybody drain a goblet. Boy, pour a goblet for Agathemer. Agathemer, take a good long drink, so you may start in good voice. And, boy, fill his goblet again when it gets low. Keep an eye on it. Begin, Agathemer."

"It is a shorter story than you anticipate," Agathemer began.

"Hedulio and I had completed the final inspection of the estate. We had begun each inspection with Chryseros' farm and had taken the farms in rotation, ending up with Feliger's. We had inspected Macer's farm in the morning, had had a leisurely bath, lunch and snooze and had ridden out to Feliger's. After looking over the last details of the toolsheds and henneries we were riding home under the overarching elms down Bran Lane. As we passed Chryseros' entrance we heard yells for help. Hedulio spurred his horse up the avenue and towards the yells, I after him. The yells guided us to the lower barn-yard gate. Hedulio reined up abruptly, leaped off, leaving me to catch his mare, and vaulted the gate. I tethered our mounts as quickly as I could and climbed the gate. I saw old Chryseros pinned against the wall of his barley-barn, in between the horns of his white bull. The points of the bull's horns were driven

into the wood of the barn and the horns were so long tha Chryseros was in no immediate danger of being crushed be tween the bull's forehead and the barn wall. The bull wa so enraged that he was pushing with all his might, puffin and bellowing, spraying Chryseros' legs with froth, grunting and lowing between bellows. As long as he kept on pushing Chryseros was more scared than hurt; but, sooner or later the bull was certain to draw back, lunge, and skewer Chrys eros on one or the other of his horns.

"When I first saw them Chryseros and the bull were as I have described. Hedulio was twisting the bull's tail.

"The bull paid no more attention to the tail-twisting than if Hedulio had been in the moon.

"Hedulio shouted to Chryseros to hold tight to the bull's horns, as he was already doing, and to stand still. He let go the bull's tail and turned round. Seeing me, he ordered me to get back over the gate and to stay there. He looked about, ran to the stable door, peered in, went in and re turned with a manure fork. With that in his hand he ran back to the bull and jabbed him with the fork.

"Then the bull did roar. He backed suddenly away from the barn, shaking his horns loose from the futile grip Chryseros had on them, and whirled on Hedulio. Hedulio jabbed him in the neck with the fork. The bull bellowed with rage, it seemed, more than with pain, lowered his head and charged at Hedulio.

"Hedulio side-stepped as deftly as a professional beast-fighter in an amphitheatre and to my amazement, well as I knew him, threw away the fork.

"The bull's rush carried him almost the whole breadth of the barn-yard. When he turned round he stood, pawing the ground, shaking his head and bellowing. I never saw a bull angrier-looking. He lowered his head to charge.

"But he never charged.

"Hedulio was walking toward him and the bull just stood and pawed and bellowed till Hedulio caught hold of the ring in his nose and led him off to his pen.

"Chryseros, who had dodged through the little door into

the barn and had slammed it after him, had peered out of it just before Hedulio reached the bull and had stood, mouth open. hands hanging, letting the door swing wide open.

"Hedulio led the bull into the pen, patted him on the neck and then turned his back on him and sauntered out of the pen, shutting the gate without hurry.

"Chryseros ran to him, stumbling as he ran, fell on his knees, caught Hedulio's hand, and poured out a torrent of thanks."

"Did all that really happen?" Tanno queried.

"Precisely as I have told it." Agathemer affirmed.

"Well," said Tanno, "I know why Caius did not want to tell it. He knew I'd think it an impudent lie."

"Don't you believe it?" Agathemer asked, respectfully.

"Well," Tanno drawled, "I've been watching the faces of the audience. Nobody has laughed or smiled or sneered. I'm an expert on curios and antiques and other specialties, but I am no wiser on bulls than any other city man. So I suppose I ought to believe it. But it struck me, while I listened to you, as the biggest lie I ever heard. I apologize for my incredulity."

"It would be incredible," said Juventius Muso, "if told or any one except Hedulio and it would probably be untrue. As it is told of Hedulio it is probably true and also entirely credible."

"Why of Caius any more than any one else?" queried Tanno.

Muso stared at him.

"I beg pardon," he said, "but I somehow got the idea that you were an old and close friend of our host."

"I was and am." Tanno asserted.

"And know nothing," Muso pressed him, "of his marvellous powers over animals of all kinds, even over birds and fish?"

"Never heard he had any such powers." Tanno confessed.

"How's this, Hedulio?" Juventius demanded of me.

"I suppose," I said, "that Tanno and I have mostly been

together at Rome. Animals are scarcer there than in the country and human beings more plentiful. He knows more of my dealings with men and women than with other creatures."

"Besides," Tanno cut in, "you must all remember that our Caius not only never boasts but is absurdly reticent about anything he has done of such a kind that most men would brag of it. Towards his chums and cronies he is open-hearted and as unreserved as a friend could be about everything else, but especially close with them about such matters. So I know nothing of his powers concerning which you speak."

My guests cried out in amazement, all talking at once.

"I'm king of the revels," Tanno reminded them.

"Juventius was talking; let him say his say. Everyone of you shall talk his fill, I promise you. I am immensely interested and curious, as I expect to hear many things which I should have heard from Caius any time these ten years. Speak out, Juventius!"

"Before I say what I meant to say," Muso began, "I want to ask some questions. What you have just told me has amazed me and what little you have said leaves me puzzled. Surely there are dogs in Rome?"

"Plenty," Tanno assured him.

"Haven't you ever seen a vicious dog fly at Hedulio?" Muso pursued.

"Many a time," Tanno admitted.

"Did you ever see one bite him?" Muso asked.

"Never!" Tanno affirmed.

"Can you recall what happened?" queried Muso.

Tanno rubbed his chin.

"It seems to me," he said, "that every time I saw a snarling cur or an open-mouthed watch-dog rush at Caius, the dog slowed his rush before he reached him, circled about him, sniffing, and trotted back where he came from."

"Did you never see Hedulio beckon such a dog, handle and gentle him, even pet him."

"Once I did, as I now recall," Tanno confessed, "yet I thought nothing of it at the time and forgot it at once."

"Probably," Muso conjectured, "you thought the dog was only pretending to be cross and was really tame."

"Just about that, I suppose," Tanno ruminated.

"Well," said Muso, "I take it that any one of the dogs you saw run at Hedulio was affected by him just as was the bull this afternoon; each began by acting towards him as he would have towards any other man; each was cowed and rendered mild by the nearer sight of him. That is the way Hedulio affects all animals whatever."

"Tell us some cases you have seen yourself," Tanno suggested.

"I fear your skepticism, even your derision," Muso demurred.

"I haven't a trace of either left in me by now," Tanno declared. "What you say has knocked the mental wind out of me, so to speak, and I see that the others feel as you do and seem to have similar ideas to express. I vow I believe you, gentlemen, though something inside me is still numb with amazement. Tell us, Juventius, the biggest story you know of these alleged powers of our Caius."

"I told you so," said Muso. "In spite of your disclaimers you slip in that 'alleged.' I don't like that 'alleged' of yours, Opsitius."

"That wasn't mine." Tanno laughed. "That was the numb something inside me talking in its sleep. I'm all sympathetic interest, with no admixture of unbelief. I can see you have startling anecdotes to tell. Tell the most startling."

"The most startling," Juventius began, "I most solemnly aver is literally true. Hedulio and I were once riding along a woodcutters' road through the forests on the Aemilian estate, in the wildest portion of it. The road forms a part of a good short-cut from Villa Aemilia to this valley. It was hot weather and very dry. We were both thirsty. There is a cool and abundant spring not many paces up a steep path on the left of that road. At the path we tethered our horses and walked to the spring. When we had quenched our thirst and had started down the little glade below the spring

we saw the head of a big gray wolf appear among some ferns at the lower end of the glade by the path on our left. I stopped, for we had no weapons. Hedulio, however, went on, never altering his easy saunter. The wolf came out of the ferns and paced up to Hedulio like a house dog. Hedulio patted his head, pulled his ears and the wolf not only did not attack him nor snap at him, nor even snarl, but showed his pleasure as plainly as any pet dog. When Hedulio had stopped petting him, I reached them. We two went on as if we were alone, leaving the wolf standing looking after us as if he were watch-dog at the house of an intimate friend."

"Rome," said Tanno, when Muso paused, "is rated the most wonderful place on earth. Rome is my home. Rome rates Sabinum low, except for olives, wines, oaks, sheep and mules. Wonders are not named among the staple products of Sabinum. Yet I come to Sabinum for the first time and hear wonders such as I never dreamed of at Rome."

"And you are only at the beginning of such wonders," spoke up Entedius Hirnio. "That tale of Muso's is mild to one I can tell and I take oath in advance to every word of my story."

"Begin it then, in the name of Hercules," Tanno urged him. "If it is what you herald we cannot have it too quickly."

"When Hedulio and I were hardly more than boys," Hirnio began, "we bird-nested and fished and hunted and roamed the woods like any pair of country lads. Parts of our woodland hereabouts are wilder than anything on the Aemilian estate, and we liked the wildest parts best. I had an uncle at Amiternum and it happened that Hedulio's uncle allowed him to go with me once when my father visited his brother. My uncle had a farm high up in the mountains east of Amiternum and Hedulio and I there revelled in wildness wilder than anything hereabouts. We had no fear and ranged the hillsides, ravines and pine-woods eager and unafraid.

"High up the mountains we blundered on a bear's den

with two cubs in it. They were old enough to be playful and young enough not to be fierce or dangerous. I was for carrying them off, but Hedulio said that if the mother returned before we were well on our way home she would certainly catch us before we could reach a place of safety and we should certainly be killed.

"'We had better stop playing with these fascinating little brutes,' he said, 'and be as far off as possible before she comes back.'

"Just as he said it we heard twigs snapping, the crash of rent underbrush, and I looked up and saw the bear coming.

"I had never seen a wild bear till then. She looked to me as big as a half grown calf, and as fat as a six-year-old sow. She came like a race-horse. Besides my instantaneous sense of her size, weight and speed, I saw only her great red mouth, wide-open, set round with gleaming white teeth, from which came a snarl like the roar of a cataract.

"I sprang to the nearest tree which promised a refuge, caught the lowest boughs and scrambled up, the angry snarls of the bear filling my ears. As I reached the first strong branch the snarls stopped.

"I settled myself and looked down.

"The bear was standing still, some paces from her den, peering at it and snuffing the air, working her nose it seemed to me, and moving her head from side to side.

"Hedulio had not moved. He stood just where I had left him, one cub in his arms, the other cuddled at his feet.

"The bear, growling very short, almost inaudible growls, approached him slowly, moving only one foot at a time and pausing before she lifted another foot. She sniffed at the cub on the ground, sniffed at Hedulio's legs, and looked up at the cub in his arms. She made a sound more like a whine than a growl. Hedulio lowered the cub and she sniffed at it. Then Hedulio caught her by the back of the neck. She did not snarl but yielded to his pull and rolled over on her side. He picked up the cub on the ground and laid both by her nipples. They went to nursing avidly, almost like little pigs, yet also somewhat like puppies. He-

dulio sauntered away and to my tree, beckoned me down and we strolled away as if there were no bear near: she in fact paying no attention to either of us after the cubs began nursing her."

Tanno looked wildly about.

"Boys," he said, "forgive me if I am dazed, and don't be insulted. I recall that Entedius prefaced his narrative with an oath to its veracity. I am ready to believe all this if he reaffirms it. But I have a horrible feeling that you farmers think you have caught a city ignoramus and that it is your duty to stuff me with the tallest stories you can invent. Please set me right. If you are stuffing me the joke is certainly on me, for these incredible tales seem true: if they are true the joke is doubly on me. As I am the butt, either way, don't be too hard on me: Please set me right."

They chorused at him that they had all heard the story, most of them soon after the marvel took place; that they had always believed it, and believed it then. I corroborated Hirnio's exactitude as to all the details.

CHAPTER IV

HOROSCOPES AND MARVELS

TANNO looked about again, less wildly, but still like a man in a daze.

"But," he cried, "if you do such wonders, how do you do them, Caius?"

"I don't know now," I said, "any more than I knew the first time I gentled a fierce strange dog. It came natural then, it always has come natural."

"Naturally," said Lisius Naepor, "since it is part of your nature from before birth. Do you mean to tell us, Opsitius, that Hedulio has never shown you his horoscope?"

"Never!" said Tanno, "and he never spoke of it to me. I'm Spanish, you know, by ancestry, and Spaniards are not

Syrians or Egyptians. Horoscopes don't figure largely in Spanish life. I never bothered about horoscopes, I suppose. So I never mentioned horoscopes to Hedulio nor he to me."

"Nor he to you of course," said Neponius Pomplio, "he is too modest."

"In fact," said Naepor. "I should never have known of Hedulio's horoscope if his uncle had not shown me a copy. Caius has never mentioned it, unless one of us talked of it first."

"What's the point of the horoscope?" Tanno queried.

"Why you see," Naepor explained. "Hedulio was born in the third watch of the night on the Ides of September.

"Now it is well known that persons are likely to be competent trainers of animals if they are born under the influence of the Whale or of the Centaur or the Lion or the Scorpion or when the Lesser Bear rises at dawn or in those watches of the night when the Great Bear, after swinging low in the northern sky, is again beginning to swing upwards, or at those hours of the day when, as it can be established by calculations, the Great Bear, though invisible in the glow of the sunlight, is in that part of its circle round the northern pole.

"It is disputed which of these constellations has the most powerful influence, but it is generally reckoned that the Whale is most influential, next the Centaur, next the Lion, and the Scorpion least of all, while the dawn rising of the Lesser Bear and the beginning of the upward motion of the Great Bear are held to have merely auxiliary influence when the other signs are favorable. If two or more of these are at one and the same time powerful in the sky at the moment of any one's birth, he will be an unusually capable animal-tamer, the more puissant according as more of the potent stars shine upon his birth.

"It is manifest that, at no day and hour, will all of these signs conspire at their greatest potency. For clearly, for instance, the Lion and the Scorpion, being both in the Zodiac, and being separated in the Zodiac by the interposition of two entire constellations, can never be in the ascendant at one

and the same time, nor can one be near the ascendant when the other is in that position. Yet there are times when a majority of them all exert their most potent or nearly their most potent influence, there are some moments when their possible combination of influences is nearly at its maximum potency.

"Now the day, hour, and moment of Hedulio's birth is, as astrologers agree, precisely that instant of the entire year when the stars combine their magic powers with their most puissant force to produce their greatest possible effect on the nature of a child born at that instant, in order that he may have irresistible sway over the wills of all fierce, wild and ferocious animals.

"Such, from his birth and by the divine might of his birth-stars, is our Hedulio."

"After all that," said Tanno, "I should believe anything. I believe the tale of the she-bear. Who has another to tell?"

"Before anyone begins another anecdote," said Neponius Pomplio, "I want to state my opinion that Hedulio's habitual and instantaneous subjugation of vicious dogs which have never before set eyes on him and his miraculous powers of similarly pacifying such wild animals as bears and wolves, while inexpressibly marvellous, is no more wonderful, if, in fact, as wondrous as his power to attract to him, even from a great distance, creatures naturally solitary, or timorous."

"It is strange," said Juventius Muso, "that I should have begun by telling the story of the wolf at the spring, an occurrence of which I was the only witness, instead of mentioning first Hedulio's power over deer, something known to all of us, and many miracles which everyone of us has seen. I suppose we each thought of the most spectacular example of Hedulio's powers known to us, whereas he had so generally handled and gentled deer that we instinctively regarded that as commonplace."

"I think you are right," said Lisius Naepor, "for Hedulio's ability to approach a doe with fawns and to handle the young in sight of the mother without her showing any sign of alarm or concern, is, to my mind, quite as marvellous as

spectfully. "I mean something quite amazing in itself. And that leads me to remark that none of you gentlemen has mentioned or referrred to what I regard as one of my master's most amazing feats and one which he has repeated countless times in the presence of uncountable witnesses: I mean taking a bone away from a vicious dog which has never seen him before. I think that amounts to a portent, or would if it had not happened so often."

"Incredible!" cried Tanno.

Then the whole room broke into a hubbub of confirmations and corroborations of Agathemer's statement.

"I give in," Tanno declared, "now for the leopard."

"I am told," said Agathemer, "that all such animals, lions, tigers, leopards, panthers and lynxes, when they set out on their nocturnal prowlings, intent on catching prey, have the strange habit of giving notice to all creatures within hearing that they are about to begin hunting, by a series of roars, snarls, squalls, screams, screeches or whatever they may be properly called for each variety of animal.

"Now one of the tricks of Nemestronia's leopard, which she is fond of exhibiting to her guests, is its method of approaching any live creature exposed to its mercy for its food. If a kid, hare, lamb, porker or what not is turned into one of Nemestronia's walled gardens and the leopard let in, she will, at first sight of the game, crouch belly-flat on the ground and give out a really appalling series of screams or whatever they should be called, entirely unlike any other noise she ever makes. Her hunting-squall, as Nemestronia calls it, rises and falls like a tune on an organ, and besides changing from shriller to less shrill alters in volume from louder to less loud and louder again. It is an experience to hear it, for it is like no sound anyone in Rome ever heard and is unforgettable."

"There you are wrong," Tanno cut in, "it is the normal hunting cry of a leopard. But not many leopards in captivity ever give it. She is the only leopard I ever heard give it in captivity, but I have heard it in the deserts south of Gaetulia and Africa, when I was there with my cohort,

while I was still in the army. And let me tell you right here, what I have often told Nemestronia, only the dear self-willed old lady will not listen to me at all, there will be trouble yet with that leopard. She has been a parlor and bedroom pet from birth and she is tame, not only to all Nemestronia's household but to all visitors. But the mere fact that she is old enough to give her hunting-squall for small game is warning enough, if Nemestronia would only realize it, that she is getting fiercer as she gets older. It's only a question of time, no matter how liberally she is fed, that she will turn on her human associates. Possibly she'll give them warning with her hunting-squall, and precious little help it will be towards escaping her, but most likely she'll just turn on someone, without warning, and there'll be a corpse and a pool of blood on the floor or pavement. You mark my words: that is coming as sure as fate, if Nemestronia keeps that leopard about her mansion."

"That may all be true," Hirnio cut in, "but Opsitius, do let Agathemer say his say, whatever it may be."

"You are right and I was wrong," Tanno admitted.

"Proceed, Agathemer."

"Let me describe her behavior fully, for the sake of the others," Agathemer resumed. "When she sights a victim she flattens herself out on the ground and gives her long, quavering squall. If the victim remains stationary she crawls toward it very slowly, almost imperceptibly, moving one paw only at a time. If it runs about she ceases her advance and pivots around until it is again stationary and she facing it. She keeps that up until she is within springing distance. But if she sees it near a gate or a door and apparently trying to escape through that, she springs and bounds on it. Otherwise, if the victim keeps quiet and still, she spends a long time in her approach, seeming to enjoy every breath she draws and to be gloating over her helpless prey."

"Just so, gentlemen," Tanno put in, "Agathemer is exact. I have seen all that over and over."

"It is the more astonishing to me," Agathemer went on, "that you have never seen Hedulio divert her attention and entice her away from her victim, even when she is within leaping distance and ready for her final spring. That, to me, is the only thing I ever saw Hedulio do surpassing his repeated success in taking a bone from a cross dog without resistance from the dog."

"Never saw him do it," Tanno declared. "Never heard of it from Nemestronia, and she'll talk 'leopard' by the hour, if you let her. Never suspected any such sorcery from Hedulio. How does he do it? Expound his methods."

"Very simple," said Agathemer. "He calls to her or he walks in front of her. At once she turns her attention to him, appears to forget her prey altogether, rubs against him, purrs, lets him chafe her ears, head and neck, seems to beg for more chafing, rolls on the ground by him and invites him to play with her. Sometimes she seems to insist on his playing with her and to threaten to lose her temper unless he does play with her."

"What do you mean by playing with her?" Tanno queried.

"Have you ever seen any of these little Egyptian cats which some folks have nowadays for pets?" Agathemer asked in his turn. "Creatures about as long as your forearm and rather gentle?"

"Certainly," said Tanno. "I've seen a number of them at ultra-fashionable mansions of the fast set, who must have the latest novelty."

"Ever see any of their kittens?" Agathemer asked.

"Two or three times I have," Tanno replied. "Amusing, fluffy little creatures, not much bigger than a man's hand."

"Ever see one play with a ball?" Agathemer asked.

Tanno laughed.

"Run after a ball, you mean," he said, "slap it first with one paw and then with the other, bound after it and all that?"

"No," said Agathemer, "I do not mean that way; I mean the way a kitten will pretend that a ball is another kitten,

will lie on the floor with the ball between its paws, will kick it with its hind feet and paw at it with its forefeet and yet not really claw it."

"I've seen that, too," said Tanno.

"Well," said Agathemer, "Hedulio acts as the ball or the other kitten for that big leopard. He lies down on the pavement by her and they tussle like two puppies, only it is cat-play not dog-play. Hedulio kicks and slaps the leopard and she kicks and slaps him, and they are all mixed up like a pair of wrestlers, and she growls and mouths his hands and arms and shoulders, yet she never bites or claws him, does all that clawing of him with her claws sheathed; never hurts him, and, when she has had enough play, lets him lead her off to her cage."

"Miraculous!" cried Tanno, "but beastly undignified. Fancy a Roman, of equestrian rank, moving in Rome's best society circles, a friend of the Emperor, sprawling on a pavement playing with a stinking leopard, letting her tousle him and rumple his clothes, and letting her slobber her foul saliva all over his arms and shoulders! I'm ashamed of you, Hedulio!"

"Nothing to be ashamed of!" I said. "I thought it fun, every time I have done it, and I did it only for Nemestronia and a few of her intimates, never before any large gathering."

"I should hope not!" Tanno cried, "and I trust you will never try it again. It's disgraceful! And it's too risky. If you keep it up some fine day she'll slash the face off you or bite your whole head off at one snap."

I was surprised and abashed at Tanno's reception of the leopard story and Agathemer seemed similarly affected and more so than I. He tried to start a diversion.

"Most marvellous of all Hedulio's exploits," he said, "I account his encounter with the piebald horse."

"Tell us about it," said Tanno. "Horse-training is, at least, and always, an activity fit for a gentleman and wholly decent and respectable."

"It happened last year," said Agathemer, "in the autumn, before Andivius died; in fact, before we had any reason to

dread that the end of his life was near. Entedius saw it, perhaps he would be a more suitable narrator than I."

"Go on," said Hirnio, "I'd rather listen to you than talk myself."

Agathemer resumed.

"We were at Reate Fair. You know how such festivals are always attended by horse-dealers and all sorts of such cheats and mountebanks. There was a plausible and ingratiating horse-dealer with some good horses. Entedius bought one and has it yet."

"And no complaints to make," said Hirnio, "the brute was as represented and has given satisfaction in every way."

"Some others in our party bought horses of him also." Agathemer continued. "Later, when the sports were on, he brought out a tall, long-barrelled piebald horse, rather a well-shaped beast, and one which would have been handsome had he been cream or bay. He showed off his paces and then offered him as a free gift to anyone who could stick on him without a fall. Several farm-lads tried and he threw them by simple buckings and rearings. Some more experienced horse-wranglers tried, but he threw one after the other.

"Then there came forward Blaesus Agellus, the best horse-master about Reate. He had watched till he thought he knew all the young stallion's tricks. No kicking, rearing or bucking could unseat him and the beast tried several unusual and bizarre contortions. Blaesus stuck on. Then the horse-dealer seemed to give a signal, as the horse cantered tamely round the ring.

"Instantly the horse, without any motion which gave warning of what he was about to do, threw himself sideways flat on the ground.

"Blaesus was stunned and his right leg badly bruised, though not broken.

"The owner gloried in his treasure and boasted of his control over the horse, even at a distance.

"Then Hedulio came forward. The crowd was visibly

amazed to see a young nobleman put himself on a level with the commonality. But they all knew Hedulio's affable ways and there were no hoots or jeers.

"Hedulio examined the horse carefully, fetlocks, hoofs, mouth and all. Then he gentled and patted it. When he vaulted into the saddle, the brute did a little rearing, kicking and bucking, but soon quieted.

"Hedulio trotted him round the ring, calling to the owner:

"'I dare you to try all your signals.'

"The owner seemed to try, at first far back in the crowd, so confident was he of his control of the horse, then nearer, then standing in the front row of spectators.

"The horse remained quiet.

"So Hedulio rode him home and all at the villa acclaimed the horse a great prize.

"The marvel was that he was only a two-year-old, as all experts agreed. I have seen many trick horses, but seldom a good trick horse under eight years old and never a well-trained trick horse under four years old. This was barely two."

"Is he still in your stables?" Tanno asked.

"Let Agathemer finish his tale," I replied.

"Two mornings afterward," Agathemer summed up, "we found the stable was broken into and the young stallion gone. No other horse had been stolen."

"Just what might have been expected," said Tanno, "and now, as king of the revels, I pronounce this symposium at an end. I mean to be up by dawn and to get Hedulio up soon after I am awake. I mean to start back for Rome with him as soon after dawn as I can arrange. You other gentlemen can sleep as late as you like, of course."

"I'm going with you," Hirnio cut in. "I came prepared, with my servant and led-mule loaded with my outfit. I'm to be up as soon as you two."

"Let's all turn in," Tanno proposed.

Mallius Vulso and Neponius Pomplio, who lived nearest me, declared their intention of riding home in the moonlight.

The others discussed whether they should also go home or sleep in the rooms ready for them. I urged them to stay, but finally, they all decided to ride home.

Agathemer went to give orders for their horses to be brought round.

"By the way, Caius," Tanno asked, "how are you going to travel?"

"On horseback," I replied.

"Why not in your carriage?" he queried. "I was hoping to ride with you to the Via Salaria, at least, unless your roads jolt a carriage as badly as bearers on them jolt a litter. What's wrong with the superperfect travelling carriage of your late Uncle?"

"I have lent it," I explained, "to Marcus Martius, to travel to Rome in with his bride. I wrote you of his wedding. He has just married my uncle's freedwoman Marcia. I wrote you about it."

"Pooh!" cried Tanno, "how should I remember the marriage of a freedwoman I never saw with a bumpkin I never heard of?"

"No bumpkin," cut in Lisius Naepor. "Not any more of a bumpkin than I or any of the rest of us here. You are too high and mighty, Opsitius. It is true that in our countryside the only senators are Aemilius, Vedius and Satronius, and that in our immediate vicinity Hirnio and Hedulio are the only proprietors of equestrian rank but we commoners here are no bumpkins or clodhoppers."

"I apologize," Tanno spoke conciliatingly. "You are right to call me down. We Romans of Rome really know the worth of farmers and provincials and the like. But we are so used, among ourselves, to thinking of Rome as the whole world, that our speech belies our esteem for our equals. I should not have spoken so. Who is Marcus Martius, Caius, and who is Marcia?"

"Marcus Martius," I said, "is a local landowner like the rest of us. He would have been here to-night but for his recent marriage and approaching journey to Rome. I have always asked him to my dinners."

"Then how, in the name of Ops Consiva," cried Tanno, "did he come to marry your uncle's freedwoman?"

"This time I agree with you, Opsitius," said Naepor. "Your tone of scorn is wholly justified. Marrying freedwomen is getting far too common. If things go on this way there will be no Roman nobility nor gentry nor even any Roman commonality; just a wish-wash of counterfeit Romans, nine-tenths foreign in ancestry, with just enough of a dash of Roman blood to bequeath them our weaknesses and vices."

"On the other hand," said Juventius Muso, "while agreeing with Naepor as to the propriety of the tone, I object to the question. Instead of asking how Martius came to marry Marcia, had you been acquainted with the recent past history of this neighborhood, Opsitius, you would have asked how most of the rest of us managed to escape marrying her."

"A freedwoman!" cried Tanno.

"A most unusual freedwoman," Hirnio asserted, "as she was almost a portent as a slave-girl. Haven't you ever heard of her, Opsitius?"

"We Romans," Tanno bantered, "are lamentably ignorant on the life-histories of brood-sows, slave-girls, prize-heifers and such-like notabilities of Sabinum."

"She is no Sabine," Hirnio retorted, "but, as far as the locality of her birth and upbringing goes, is as Roman as you are. Did you never hear of Ummidius Quadratus?"

"Hush!" Tanno breathed. "I have heard of the man you have named, heard of him on the deaf side of my head, as did all Rome. But, in the name of Minerva, do not utter his name. It is best forgotten. Even so long after his execution and so far from Rome, the mention of the name of anyone implicated as he was might have most unfortunate results."

"Not here and among us," Hirnio declared. "The point is that Quadratus had a eunuch less worthless than most eunuchs. He became a very clever surgeon and physician, and endeared himself to Quadratus by many cures among his

countless slaves, and even among his kin. Quadratus made him his chief physician and trusted him utterly. Naturally he let him set up an establishment of his own, allowing him to select a location. Hyacinthus, for that is the eunuch's name, instead of choosing for a home any one of a dozen desirable neighborhoods well within his means with the liberal allowance Quadratus gave him, settled in a peculiarly vile slum, because, as he said, his associates mostly lived there; meaning by his associates the votaries of some sort of Syrian cult, chiefly peddlers and such, living like ants or maggots, all packed together in the rookeries of that quarter.

"Hyacinthus was not only a member of their sect, but their hierophant, or whatever they call it, and presided at the ceremonies of their religion at their little temple somewhere in the same part of the city.

"He divided his energies between his calling of surgeon, at which he prospered amazingly, and his avocation of hierophant.

"As head of their cult it fell to him to care for the orphans of their poorer families and for foundlings, for such Asiatics never expose infants or fail to succor exposed infants.

"Marcia was a foundling and brought up by Hyacinthus, therefore, legally a slave of Quadratus.

"Quadratus saw her and took a fancy to her. He had her taught not only dancing, music and such accomplishments, but had her educated almost as if she had been his niece or daughter.

"When she was yet but a half-grown girl, she had acquired such a hold on him that he used to bewail it. What was it he said, Hedulio?"

"I have heard him say to my uncle," I said, "that Marcia was as imperious as if she were Empress and that living with her was as bad as being married. Quadratus was born to be a bachelor and never thought of matrimony. But though he had solaced himself with a long series of beauties in all previous cases his word had been law and not one of his concubines had had any will of her own. Marcia's word

was law to him, even her tone or look. She had wheedled him into lavishing on her flowers, perfumery, jewels, an incredibly varied and costly wardrobe, maids, masseuses, bathgirls, a mob of waiters, cooks, doorkeepers, litter-bearers and what not and the most costly equipages.

"He groaned, but was too infatuated to deny her anything.

"My uncle sympathized with him and, with the idea of disabusing him of his folly, somehow, while visiting him, saw Marcia.

"Uncle at once fell madly in love with her.

"He offered to buy her.

"That was just before Quadratus became involved in the intrigues radiating from Lucilla's conspiracy, was implicated in the conspiracy itself and so disgraced and executed.

"Marcia seems to have had some prevision or inkling of what was coming. Anyhow she could not have acted more for her own interest if she had had accurate information of what was impending. She cajoled Uncle into buying her and coaxed Quadratus into selling her.

" 'Take her,' Quadratus told him, 'at your own price. If you don't or if somebody else don't free me from this vampire, I'll be fool enough to manumit her and marry her as soon as she is free!'

"Uncle brought her up here.

"Did she wail at leaving Rome and mourn over seclusion in our hills? Not she.

"She made as big a fool of Uncle as she had of Quadratus.

"He, with his ill health and his frequent illnesses, got as much satisfaction out of Marcia as a blind man would get from a painting. But he indulged her far beyond his means. He gave her the little west villa for her home, and a small horde of servants. She wheedled him into freeing her and then, from the day she was freed, set herself to marry and marry well. She had every bachelor and widower hereabouts visiting her, dangling about her, competing for her smiles, showering gifts on her, soliciting her favor!

"When they found, one by one, that the only road to her favors was by matrimony, they sheered off in terror, one by one.

"She nearly married Vedius Caspo, came almost as near with Satronius Sabinus.

"Then, when she saw no hope left of a senator, she almost landed Hirnio, tried to marry Uncle, and tried to marry me."

"And just missed all three," said Hirnio, fervently. "I am still equally congratulating myself on my escape and wondering over it. I was sure Andivius would marry her, sure of it until his last illness made it impossible. And I feared for our Hedulio here.

"The only man hereabouts whom she did not try to marry was Ducconius Furfur. She had made eyes at his father, and Ducconius was precious afraid she would be his stepmother. At first he railed at her. Then, just before his father's death, it was manifest to everybody that he was yielding to her fascinations, himself. Hardly was old Ducconius buried when young Furfur lost his head completely and fell madly in love with Marcia. She could have married him easily; in fact, he offered marriage, not only to her in private, but before witnesses. She, for some reason, would not hear of marrying him. In fact, Furfur, it seems, was the only bachelor hereabouts whom she was unwilling to marry. She flouted him, derided him, and finally forbade him her house and ordered him never to dare to approach her. He kept away, sulky and morose and low-spirited.

"After that episode she had a go at Muso, the only other bachelor among us seven.

"Finally she fastened on Marcus Martius, who is not quite as rich as Muso, but yet comfortably well off. She married him day before yesterday."

"Thanks be to Hercules," Tanno cried, "that I have never set eyes on the jade. I'm for matrimony only with an heiress of my own class and only with such an heiress as I personally fancy. No matrimony for me otherwise."

With this the party broke up. We all went out on the

terrace. My six neighbors mounted and cantered off on their various roads home; Tanno, Hirnio and I went in and to bed.

CHAPTER V

ENCOUNTERS

NEXT morning I was wakened by a dash of cold water over me and sat up in bed dripping and angry. Tanno was bending over me.

"I had to souse you," he explained. "I've been shaking you and yelling at you and you stayed as fast asleep as before I touched you. Get up and let's start for Rome."

We enjoyed a brief rubdown and after Entedius joined us each relished a small cup of mulled wine and one of Ofatulena's delicious little hot, crisp rolls.

In the east courtyard we found our equipages and I descried my tenants outside the gate, all horsed and each muffled in a close rain-cloak, topped off by a big umbrella hat, its wide brim dripping all round its edge, for the weather was atrocious; foggy mist blanketing all the world under a gray sky from which descended a thin, chilly drizzle.

Hirnio was inspecting Tanno's litter and chatting with Tanno about it.

"Never saw one with poles like this," he said. "All I have seen had one long pole on each side, a continuous bar of wood from end to end. What's the idea of four poles, half poles you might call them, two on a side?"

"You see," Tanno explained. "It is far harder to get sound, flawless, perfect poles full length. Then, too, full-length spare poles are very bothersome and inconvenient to carry. With a litter equipped in this fashion one man can carry a spare pole, and they are much easier and quicker to put in if a pole snaps."

"I should think," Hirnio remarked, "that the half-poles would pull out of the sockets."

"Not a bit," said Tanno, "they clamp in at the end, this way. See? The clamps fasten instantly and release at a touch, but hold tenaciously when shut."

Under the arcade my household had gathered to say farewell and wish me good luck. I spoke briefly to each and thanked Ofatulena for her distinguished cookery, both in respect to the credit her masterpieces had done me at dinner and also for the taste of her rolls, which yet lingered in mouth and memory. Tanno also expressed his admiration of her powers.

Last I said farewell to my old nurse and foster mother Uturia, who, when I was scarcely a year old, had closed the eyes of my dying mother, and not much later of my father, and who had not merely suckled me, but had been almost as my real mother to me in my childhood.

She could not keep back her tears, as always at our partings; the more as she had had dreams the night before and she took her dreams very seriously.

"Deary," she sobbed, "it has been revealed to me that you go into great perils when you set out to-day. I saw danger all about you, danger from men and danger from beasts. Beware of strangers, of narrow streets, of walled gardens, of plots, of secret conferences. All these threaten you especially."

I kissed her as heartily as if she had been my own mother.

"Don't worry, Uturia," I said, "as long as I live I'll take care of you and if I die you shall be a free woman with a cottage and garden and three slaves of your own."

But she only sobbed harder, both as she clung to me and after I had mounted.

Tanno, of course, rolled into his litter and slid the panels against the rain. His bearers were muffled up precisely like my tenants. So was Tanno's intendant, so was Hirnio, so was I. The entire caravan was a mere column of horses, cloaks and hats, not a man visible, all the faces hid under the flapping hat-brims, no man recognizable.

Hirnio and I led, next came Tanno in his litter, then his extra bearers, next his intendant on horseback, then my nine

tenants, each horsed and leading a pack-mule, last the mounted servants, Tanno's, Hirnio's and mine, similarly leading pack-mules, in all twenty-seven men afoot, sixteen mounted and twelve led mules.

As we strung out Tanno called to me:

"Luck for us if we don't blunder into one of those ambushes we heard about at dinner last night. With all this cavalcade everybody we meet cannot fail to conjecture that so large a party can only be from either Villa Vedia or Villa Satronia, such an escort misbefits anyone not of senatorial rank. If we do blunder into an ambush either side will know we are not their men and will assume we are of the other party. No one can recognize anybody in this wet-weather rig. Any ambush will attack first and investigate afterwards or not at all."

Had I heeded his chance words I might, even then, have saved myself. But while my ears heard him my wits were deaf. I called back:

"There are no ambushes. Each side spreads such rumors to discredit the other, but neither so much as thinks of ambush. If Xantha or Greia is located, the clan concerned for her freedom will gather a rescue-party and there may be fight over her, but there are no ambushes."

At the foot of my road Hirnio and I turned to our left. Tanno from his litter emitted a howl of protest.

"Nothing," he yelled, "will induce me to traverse that road again. I told you so. You promised to take the other road. What do you mean?"

"Don't worry, Opsitius," Hirnio reassured him. "We turned instinctively according to habit. You shall have your way. It is not much farther by the other road."

"Anyhow," I added, "Martius is not in sight. He was to have been here before us. If we went this way we should have to wait for him. If we go the other we shall most likely meet him at the fork of the road."

We turned to our right towards Villa Vedia and Vediamnum. About half way to the entrance to Villa Vedia, at the top of the hill between the two bridges, the rain for a

brief interval fairly cascaded from the sky. During this temporary downpour, as we splashed along, we saw loom out of the rain, fog and mist the outline of what might have been an equestrian statue, but which, as we drew up to it, we found a horse and rider, stationary and motionless to the south of the road, on a tiny knoll, facing the road and so close to it that I might have put out my right hand and touched the horse's nose as we passed.

Like everyone in our convoy the rider was enveloped in a rain-cloak and his head and face hidden under a wide-brimmed umbrella hat. He saluted as I came abreast of him, but his salutation was merely a perfunctory wave of a hand, an all-but-imperceptible nod and an inarticulate grunt.

I barely caught a glimpse of his face, but I made sure he was no one I had ever seen before and equally sure that he was not a Sabine.

When we reached the entrance of Villa Vedia, which was also the crossroad down which Marcus Martius and his bride must come, there was no sign of a travelling carriage, nor any fresh ruts in the road.

We halted and peered into the mist. Nothing was in sight on the road, but there was a stir in the bushes by the roadside. Out of them appeared a bare head, with a shock of tousled, matted, rain-soaked gray hair, a hatchet face, brow like a bare skull, bleared eyes, far apart and deepset on either side of a sharp hooked nose like the beak of a bird of prey, high cheekbones under the thin, dry, tight-drawn skin above the sunken cheeks, a wide, thin-lipped mouth and a chin like a ship's prow. The rain trickled down the face.

Up it rose, till there was visible under it a lean stringy neck, a tattered garment, and the outline of a gaunt, emaciated body, that of a tall, spare, half-starved old woman.

I recognized the Aemilian Sibyl, as all the countryside called her, an old crone who had, since before the memory of our oldest patriarchs, lived in a cave in the woods on the Aemilian Estate, supported by the gifts doled out to her by the kindness, respect or fear of the slaves and peasantry

living nearest her abode, for she had a local reputation for magical powers in the way of spells to cure or curse, charms for wealth or health, love philtres, fortune-telling, prophecy and good advice on all subjects likely to cause uncertainty of mind in farm-life.

She towered out of the dripping shrubberies and pointed a long skinny finger at me.

"I know you under your cloak and hat, Hedulio," she wheezed. "Well for you if younger folk than I had such eyes in their heads as I have in my spirit. I know you, Andivius Hedulio. You turn your face towards Reate, but you shall never see Reate this day. You might as well take the road to Rome and be done with it, for to Rome you shall go, whether you will or not. Whether you will or not, whatever road your feet take, you will find it leads you to Rome, whatever ship you take, no matter to what port she steers, will land you at Rome's Wharf. They say all roads lead to Rome. For you, in truth, every road leads to Rome, whether you face towards Rome or away from Rome.

"Be warned! Yield to your fate! If you would have luck, go to Rome, abide in Rome; and if you must leave Rome, return to Rome.

"And hearken to my words, let them sink deep into your mind, remember them and heed them; beware of a man with a hooked nose, beware of secret conferences, beware of plots, walled gardens, beware of narrow streets, for these will be your undoing!"

Agathemer had edged his horse along the roadside the length of our cavalcade and had joined me. He dismounted, strode to the hag and held out his hand to her, some silver pieces on its palm, saying:

"My master thanks you for your warning and offers you these as a guerdon."

"Greek!" she screamed. "I warn not for guerdons, but at the behest of the God of Prophecy. Begone with your silver! Silver I scorn and gold and all the treasures of mankind's folly and all the joys of mankind's life. I am the Sibyl!"

And she tramped off through the crackling underbrush till the trees hid her and the noise of her going died away, till she was so far off that we heard the rain drops drip from the boughs and the horses fret at their bits.

So at a standstill, as we stared expectantly up the cross-road, we saw come into sight, not a travelling carriage, but a horseman, looming huge out of the fog, a vast bulk of a man on a big black horse like a farm work-horse.

He drew rein and saluted civilly, tilting up his hat. His face was ruddy, his eyes blue, his expression that of a mountaineer from a village or small town.

"I have lost my way," he said. "My name is Murmex Lucro. I come from Nersae and am bound for Rome. I was told of a short cut that should have brought me out on the Salarian Road near Trebula. But I must have taken a wrong turn, for I was wholly at a loss at dusk yesterday and so camped in the woods by a spring. I have not met a human being since daylight. Where am I and how can I reach the Via Salaria?"

"You are not far from it," Hirnio told him. "We are bound for Rome and if you join us you can reach the Via Salaria with us by the road on which we are going. Should you prefer to follow the road along which we have come, which is rough, but less roundabout, you can, by taking every turn to the right, reach the Via Salaria some miles nearer Rome than where our road will bring us out on it."

"I'll join your cavalcade, if you have no objection," the stranger said.

Hirnio and I expressed our entire willingness to have his company.

Hirnio asked him:

"Are you in any way related to Murmex Frugi?"

"He was my father," Murmex replied, simply.

"Was!" Hirnio repeated. "The word strikes ominously on my ear. Someone from this neighborhood, I forget who, was in Nersae since the roads became fit for travelling this spring and returned from there, or perhaps some wayfarer

from Nersae stopped with someone hereabouts. At any rate we heard he had seen Murmex Frugi still hale and sound, even at his advanced age."

"My father," said Murmex, "was still hale and sound on the Kalends of May and for a day or two thereafter. He fell ill with a cough and fever, and died after only two nights' illness, on the Nones of May, barely more than a month ago."

"He lived to a green old age," said Hirnio, "and must have enjoyed every moment of his life."

"He seemed to," said Murmex.

"And I conjecture," I put in, "that he was proud of his son."

"He seemed so," Murmex admitted, "but he was never a tenth as proud of me as I of him."

"It is an honor," I said, "to be the son of the greatest gladiator of our fathers' days, of the man esteemed the best swordsman Italy ever saw live out his term of service and live to retire on his savings."

"It is," Murmex said, as simply as before.

Here we were interrupted by a yell from Tanno, as he leaned out of his litter.

"Are we going to take root here," he bawled, "like Phaethon's sisters? We were supposed to be journeying to Rome. We appear to be bound for Hades; we shall certainly reach it if we continue sinking into your Sabine mud!"

"Martius agreed to wait for me, if I was late," I shouted back to him. "I agreed to wait for him; I keep my word. If you choose, we'll get out of your way and let you pass on. We can catch up with you."

"Bah!" he roared. "No going it alone on a Sabine road for me! I'm tied to you hand and foot. But this waiting in the rain is no fun! Did you notice that man on horseback we passed on the road?"

"I did," I called back.

"Do you know who he is?"

"Never set eyes on him before," I replied.

"Do you know what he is?"

"No," I answered, "I do not. What is he, according to your conjecture?"

"I'm not depending on any conjectures," Tanno bellowed. "I know to a certainty."

"Then tell us," I called.

"Not here!" cried Tanno. "I'll tell you later."

He pulled his head inside his litter.

We again stared up the crossroad. Nothing was in sight.

"It seems to me," Hirnio again addressed Murmex, "that not only your father was a Nersian, but also Pacideianus and that I have heard that he also was living in retirement at Nersae."

"He is yet," rejoined Murmex, laconically.

"Then you know him?" Hirnio queried.

"My mother," said Murmex, "is his sister."

"Your uncle!" cried Hirnio, "son to one of the two greatest retired gladiators in Italy, nephew to the other! Living in the same town with them! Did either of them ever teach you anything of sword play?"

"Both of them," said Murmex, "taught me everything they knew of sword play, from the day I could hold a toy lath sword."

"Hercules!" I cried, "and what did they say of your proficiency?"

"My father with his last breath," said Murmex solemnly, "and my uncle Pacideianus as he bade me farewell, told me that I am the best swordsman alive."

"Why have you never," I asked, "tried your luck in the arena?"

"My father forbade me," Murmex explained. "He bade me wait. He trowed a grown man was worth ten growing lads, and he said so and stuck to that. On his death-bed he told me I was almost seasoned. After we buried him I felt I could abide Nersae no longer. Uncle agreed with me that I had best follow my instincts. I fare to Rome to seek my fortune as a swordsman on the sand in the amphitheatres."

"You have fallen into good company," I said, "for I can bring you at once to the Emperor's notice."

"I should be most grateful," said Murmex.

At that instant we heard an halloo from the road and saw a horseman appear out of the mist, then a travelling carriage behind him. It was Martius. When he was near enough I could see his grave, handsome, mediocre face far back in the carriage, and beside it Marcia's; small, delicate, shell-pink, her intense blue eyes bright even in that blurred gloomy daylight, shining close together over her little aquiline nose.

We conferred and he agreed to fall in behind Tanno's extra bearers, between them and my farmers, Tanno's intendant getting in front of the litter where he normally belonged.

We got properly into line as arranged and plodded on down the road.

Just outside of Vediamnum was, as Tanno had related, the village idiot, guarding his flock of goats. He mowed and gibbered at us and then spoke some intelligible words, as he occasionally did.

"I know you, Hedulio," he called. "You can't hide yourself under that hat nor inside that raincloak. I know you, Hedulio. But nobody but an idiot would ever recognize you inside that rig and with all this escort. I know you, you aren't Vedius Vindex, you aren't Satronius Sabinus. You're Andivius Hedulio. I know you. But nobody else will guess who you are. Nobody else around here is an idiot!"

Again, as with Tanno's utterance when we were leaving my villa, the words fell on my ears but did not penetrate to my thinking consciousness. Had I noted what I heard, had I thought instantaneously of what the idiot's words really signified, I might even then have saved myself.

We plodded on, a long cavalcade of horsemen and bevy of men afoot, convoying a shut litter and a closed travelling carriage.

Round the turn of the road, after passing the idiot and his goats, with the brawling stream of the Bran Brook, now swollen to a respectable little river, on our left, with the

wooded hills rising on our right, we entered the long, narrow winding single street of Vediamnum, a paved lane along the close-crowded tall stone houses built against the hillside on the northeast, with the stream along it to the southwest, and houses wedged between the street and the stream, brokenly, for about half of its length, with open intervals between.

As we entered the village I saw ahead on the street not a human form, saw no face at any door of any house. I wondered over this, wondered uncomprehendingly. I had never seen the street of Vediamnum wholly deserted, not even in rains much harder than that which descended on us. Still wondering, still uncomprehending, when we were far enough into the village for the travelling carriage to be already between the first houses, I saw fall across the roadway, in front of me, two stout trunks of trimmed trees, straight like pine trees; I heard the crash as they jarred on the stones of the stream-side wall, I saw them quiver as they settled; breast high and shoulder high from house-wall to house-wall, effectually blocking the highway.

At the same instant there sounded a chorus of yells, shouts, calls, cheers and commands; and men poured out of the house doors, out of the alleys between the houses, up the river bank in the unbuilt intervals; men hatless and cloakless, clad only in their tunics, men with clubs, with staffs, with staves, with bludgeons, with cudgels, men yelling:

"Greia! Greia! Rescue Greia! Club 'em! Brain 'em! Chase 'em! Vedius forever! At 'em boys! Mustard's the word! Make 'em run! Rescue Posis!"

They clubbed us. They clubbed the horses, they clubbed the mules, they clubbed the bearers and their reliefs. They gave us no time to explain, and though I yelled out who I was and who was with me, though Hirnio and Tanno and Martius yelled similarly, their explanations were unheard in the hubbub or unheeded. Also our effort to explain was brief. Swathed as we were in our cloaks the hot gush of rage that flamed up in us drove us instinctively to free our arms and fight.

Now anyone might suppose that it would be an easy matter for some eighteen horsemen to ride down and scatter a mob of varlets afoot. So it would be in the open, when the riders were aware of the attack and ready to meet it. We were taken wholly by surprise whereas our assailants were ready and agreed. For a moment it looked like a rout for us, our horses and mules rearing and kicking, our whole caravan in confusion, jammed together higgledy-piggledy, with all our attackers headed for the carriage, mistaking Marcia for Greia.

Marcia never screamed, never moved, sat still and silent, apparently calm and placid.

They all but dragged her out of the carriage.

In fact we should indubitably have been frightfully mauled and Marcia carried off had it not been for Murmex and Tanno.

At first onset Tanno had yelled explanations; but almost with his first yell he rolled out of his litter, snatched a spare pole from a relief, and with it laid about him; Murmex did the like. The two of them, one on the right of the litter and carriage, the other on the left, bore the whole shock of our attackers' first rush and alone delayed it.

Somehow, probably by Tanno's orders, perhaps by their own instincts, the reliefs with the other poles handed them to Hirnio and me as we dismounted. Three of the clever blacks caught our horses and Murmex's. Others detached the poles from the litter and the four biggest bearers seized them and used them vigorously.

Thus, actually quicker than it takes to tell of it, eight powerful, skillful and justly incensed men on our side were plying litter poles against the cudgels of our attackers.

I was severely bruised before I warmed up to my work; when I did warm up I laid a man flat with every blow of the pole I wielded.

When my adversaries had had a sufficient taste of my skill to cause them to draw away from me, as far as they could in that press of men, horses and mules, and I had cleared a space around me, I looked about.

Agathemer, light built as he was, had wrenched a bludgeon from some Vedian and was wielding it not ineffectually.

Hirnio was doing his part in the fighting like a gentleman and an expert.

But Murmex and Tanno chiefly caught my eye.

It was wonderful to see Tanno fight. Every swing of his pole cracked on a skull. Men fell about him by twos and threes, one on the other.

If Tanno was wonderful Murmex was marvellous. Never had I seen a man handle a staff so rapidly and effectively.

By this time my nine tenants were afoot, and uncloaked. Now a Sabine farmer, afoot or horsed, is never without his trusty staff of yew or holly or thorn. These the nine used to admiration, if less miraculously than Tanno and Murmex.

Since there were now a round dozen skilled fencers plying their staffs on our side, and four huge and mighty Nubians doing their best (with no mean skill of their own, either) to assist us, we soon were on the way to victory.

The remnant of our adversaries still on their feet fled; fled up the alleys between the houses, into the houses, down the bank towards the stream or into the stream, over the barricade of the twin logs.

That barricade made it impossible for us to go on. The number of men laid low, some of whom were reviving from their stunned condition and crawling or staggering away from under the hoofs of the crazed horses and mules, made it unthinkable that any explanation of the mistake which had led to the fracas could be possible, or if possible, that explanation could quench the fires of animosity which blazed in the breasts of all concerned.

With one accord, without any conference or the exchange of a word, our party made haste to escape from Vediamnum before our assailants rallied for a second onset. No horse or mule was hamstrung or lamed, no man had been knocked senseless. All of us were more or less bruised and sore, some were bleeding, two of my tenants had blood pouring from torn scalps, but every man, horse and mule was fit to travel.

We carried, lifted, dragged or rolled out of the way the

disabled Vedians in the roadbed, making sure that not one was killed, we somehow got the travelling carriage turned round, no small feat in that narrow space; we readjusted the litter-poles, Tanno climbed in, Hirnio and Murmex and I mounted, Tanno's extra litter bearers led my farmers' horses and mules and we set off on our retreat, my nine tenants, even with two of them half scalped, forming a rear-guard of entirely competent bludgeoners; certainly they must have impressed the Vedians as adequate, for no face so much as showed at a doorway until we were clear of the village and my tenants remounted. Then came a few derisive yells after us as the mist cut off our view of the nearest houses.

We made haste, you may be sure. Outside of the village we passed the idiot and his goats. He mowed and grinned at us, but uttered no word. We saw no other human figure till we had passed the entrance to Villa Vedia and felt safer. Nor did we pass anyone between that cross-road and the foot of my road, save only the same immobile horseman on the same knoll, in the same position, and, apparently, at precisely the same spot, as if he were indeed an equestrian statue. His salutation was as curt as before.

At the foot of my road we held a consultation. Hirnio advised returning to my villa and demanding an apology from Vedius, even instituting legal proceedings at Reate if he did not make an apology and enter a disclaimer. But Tanno, Martius and all my tenants, even the two with cracked heads, were for going on, and, of course, Murmex, who talked as if he had been a member of our company from the first.

"Hercules be good to me," Tanno cried, "to get out of this cursed neighborhood I am willing even to face the horrors of the bit of road I suffered on as I came up. Let us be off on our road to Rome."

"With all my heart," I said. "But first tell me who or what is that voiceless and moveless horseman we passed twice between here and the crossroads. You said you knew."

"I do know," Tanno grunted, "and I'm not fool enough to

blurt it out on a country road, either. Let's be off. Attention! Form ranks! Ready! Forward! March!"

Off we set, ordering our caravan as at first, except that Agathemer rode by me, with Hirnio and Murmex in advance.

We plodded down the muddy road, through the fine, continuous drizzle, wrapped in our cloaks, all the world about us helmed in fog, mist and rain, the trees looming blurred and gray-green in the wet air.

Without meeting any wayfarers, with little talk among ourselves, we had passed the entrance to Villa Satronia and were no great distance from the Salarian Highway, when, where the road traversed a dense bit of woodland, the trees of which met overhead, the underbrush on both sides of the road suddenly rang with yells and was alive with excited men.

It was almost the duplicate of our experience in Vediamnum, save that our assailants were more numerous and shouted:

"Xantha, Xantha, rescue Xantha!"

"Satronius forever! Eat 'em alive, boys! Get Xantha! Get Xantha!" and such like calls.

This time we had an infinitesimally longer warning, as the bushes to right and left of the road were further apart than had been the houses lining the streets of Vediamnum; also we reacted more quickly to the yells, having heard the like such a short time before.

The fight was fully joined all along the line and was raging with no advantage for either side, when I missed a parry and knew no more.

Afterwards I was told that I fell stunned from a blow on the head and lay, bleeding not only from a terrific scalp wound but also from a dozen other abrasions, until the fight was over, our assailants routed and completely put to flight, and Tanno with the rest of the pursuers returned to the travelling carriage and litter to find Marcia, pink and pretty and placid, seated as she had been when she left home, and me, weltering in a pool of blood.

A dozen Satronians lay stunned. Tanno reckoned two of them dead men.

I was the only man seriously hurt on our side.

Agathemer was for convoying me home.

Tanno hooted at the idea, expatiating on the distance from Reate and the improbability of such a town harboring a competent physician, on the number of excellent surgeons in Rome, on the advisability of getting me out of the locality afflicted with our Vedian-Satronian feud, and so on.

He had me bandaged as best might be and composed in his litter.

He took my horse.

To me the journey to Rome was and is a complete blank. I was mostly insensible, and, when I showed signs of consciousness, was delirious. I recall nothing except a vague sense of endless pain, misery and horror. I have no memory of anything that occurred on the road after I was hit on the head, nor of the first night at Vicus Novus nor of the second at Eretum. I first came to myself about the tenth hour of the third day, when we were but a short distance from Rome and in full sight of it.

The view of Rome, from any eminence outside the city from which a view of it may be had, has has always seemed to me the most glorious spectacle upon which a Roman may feast his eyes. As a boy my tutors had yielded to my importunities and had escorted me to every one of those elevations near the city famous as viewpoints. As a lad I had ridden out to each many times, whenever the weather promised a fine view, to delight my soul with the aspect of the great city citizenship in which was my dearest heritage. To have been born a Roman was my chief pride; to gaze at Rome, to exult at the beauty of Rome, was my keenest delight.

More even than the acclaimed viewpoints, to which residents like me and visitors from all the world flocked on fine afternoons, did I esteem those places on the roads radiating from Rome where a traveller faring Romeward caught his first sight of the city; or those points where, if one road

had several hill-crests in succession, one had the best view possible anywhere along the road.

Of the various roads entering Rome it always appeared to my judgment that the Tiburtine Highway afforded the most charming views of the city.

But, along the Salarian Highway, are several rises at the top of each of which one sees a fascinating picture when looking towards Rome. Of these my favorite was that from the crest of the ascent after one crosses the Anio, just after passing Antemnæ, near the third milestone.

This view I love now as I have always loved it, as I loved it when a boy. To halt on that crest of the road, of a fair, still, mild, brilliant afternoon when the sun is already visibly declining and its rays fall slanting and mellow; to view the great city bathed in the warm, even light, its pinnacles, tower-roofs, domes, and roof-tiles flashing and sparkling in the late sunshine, all of it radiant with the magical glow of an Italian afternoon, to see Rome so vast, so grandiose, so majestic, so winsome, so lovely; to know that one owns one's share in Rome, that one is part of Rome; that, I conceive, confers the keenest joy of which the human heart is capable.

It so happened that Tanno had his litter opened, that I might get all the air possible, and the curtains looped back tightly. Somehow, at the very crest of that rise on the Salarian Road, on a perfect afternoon, about the tenth hour, I came to myself.

I was aching in every limb and joint, I was sore over every inch of my surface, I was all one jelly of bruises, my head and my left shin hurt me acutely. More than all that I was permeated by that nameless horror which comes from weakness and a high fever.

Now it would be impossible to convey, by any human words, the strangeness of my sensations. My sufferings, my illness, my distress of mind enveloped me and permeated me with a general misery in which I could not but loathe life, the world and anything I saw, and I saw before me the most magnificent, the most noble, the most inspiriting sight the world affords.

At the instant of reviving I was overwhelmed by my sensations, by my recollections of the two fights and of all they meant to me of misfortune and disaster, and I was more than overwhelmed by the glory spread before me. I went all hot and cold inside and all through me and lost consciousness.

After this lapse I was not conscious of anything until I began to be dimly aware that I was in my own bed in my own bedroom in my own house and tended by my own personal servants.

Strangely enough this second awakening was as different as possible from my momentary revival near Antemnæ. Then I had been appalled by the rush of varying sensations, crowding memories, conflicting emotions and daunting forebodings, each of which seemed as distinct, vivid and keen as every other of the uncountable swarm of impressions: I had felt acutely and cared extremely. Now every memory and sensation was blurred, no thought of the future intruded, I accepted without internal questionings whatever was done for me, and lay semi-conscious, incurious and indifferent. Mostly I dozed half-conscious. I was almost in a stupor, at peace with myself and all the world, wretched, yet acquiescing in my wretchedness, not rebellious nor recalcitrant.

This semi-stupor gradually wore off, my half-consciousness between long sleeps growing less and less blurred, my faculties more alive, my personality emerging.

When I came entirely to myself I found Tanno seated by my bed.

"You're all right now, Caius," he said, "I have kept away till Galen said you were well enough for me to talk to you."

"Galen?" I repeated, "have I been as ill as all that?"

"Not ill," Tanno disclaimed, "merely bruised. You are certainly a portent in a fight. I never saw you fight before, never saw you practice at really serious fencing, never heard anybody speak of you as an expert, or as a fighter. But I take oath I never saw a man handle a stave as you did. You were quicker than lightning, you seemed in ten places at once, you were as reckless as a Fury and as effectual as a

thunderbolt. You laid men out by twos and threes. But jammed as you were in a press of enemies you were hit often and hard, so often and so hard that, after you were downed by a blow on the head, you never came to until I had you where you are."

"Yes I did," I protested, "I came to on the hilltop this side of Antemnæ."

"Not enough to tell any of us about it," he soothed me. "Anyhow, you are mending now and will soon be yourself."

I was indifferent. My mind was not yet half awake.

"Did I fight as well as you say?" I asked, "or are you flattering me?"

"No flattery, my boy," he said. "You are a portent."

Then he told me of the result of the fight with the Satronians, of their complete discomfiture and rout, of how he had brought me to Rome, seen me properly attended and looked after my tenants.

"They are having the best time," he said, "they ever had in all their lives."

And he told me where he had them lodged and which sights of Rome they had seen from day to day.

"Just as soon as I had seen to you and them," he said, "I called on dear old Nemestronia and told her of your condition. She is full of solicitude for you and will overwhelm you with dainties as soon as you are well enough to relish any."

He did not mention Vedia and I was still too dazed, too numb, too weak, too acquiescent to ask after her, or even to think of asking after her or to notice that he had not mentioned her.

"While I was talking to Nemestronia," Tanno said, "I took care to warn her about that cursed leopard. She would not agree to cage it, at least not permanently. She did agree to cage it at night and said she would not let it have the run of her palace even by day, as it has since she first got it, but would keep it shut up in the shrubbery garden, as she calls it, where they usually feed it and where you and I have seen it crawl up on its victims and pounce on them."

I could not be interested in leopards, or Nemestronia or even in Vedia, if he had mentioned Vedia. I fell into a half doze. Just on the point of going fast asleep I half roused, queerly enough.

"Caius!" I asked, "do you remember that man on horseback we passed in the rain between my road entrance and Vediamnum?"

"You can wager your estate I remember him!" Tanno replied.

"What sort of man was he?" I queried, struggling with my tendency to sleep. "You said you knew."

"I do know," Tanno asserted, "I cannot identify him, though I have questioned those who should know and who are safe. I should know his name, but I cannot recall it or place him. But I know his occupation. He is a professional informer in the employ of the palace secret service, an Imperial spy.

"Now what in the name of Mercury was he doing in the rain on a Sabine roadside? I cannot conjecture."

This should have roused me staring wide awake.

But I was too exhausted to take any normal interest in anything.

"I can't conjecture either," I drawled thickly.

CHAPTER VI

A RATHER BAD DAY

NEXT morning, strangely enough, I wakened at my normal, habitual time for wakening when in town, and wakened feeling weak indeed and still sore in places, but entirely myself in general and filled with a sort of sham energy and spurious vigor.

By me, when I woke, was Occo, my soft-voiced, noiseless-footed, deft-handed personal attendant. At my bidding he summoned Agathemer. When I told him that I proposed

to get up, dress and go out as I usually did when in Rome, in fact that I intended to follow the conventional and fashionable daily routine to which I had been habituated, he protested vigorously. He said that both Celsianus and Galen, the two most acclaimed physicians in Rome, who had been called in in consultation by my own physician, but also he himself, had enjoined most emphatically that I must remain abed for some days yet, must keep indoors for many days more, if I was to continue on the road to recovery on which their ministrations had set me, and that all three had bidden him tell me that any transgression of their instructions would expose me to the probability of a relapse far more serious than my initial illness and to a far longer period of inactivity.

I was determined and obstinate. When he added that I must not only remain quiet, but must not talk for any length of time nor concern myself with any news or any matters likely to excite me, I revolted. I commanded him to obey me and to be silent as to the physicians' orders.

I began by asking him what day it was. I then learned that I had been ill fifteen days since reaching Rome, for I had left my villa on the eighth day before the Ides of June and it was now the ninth day before the Kalends of July.

Next I asked after my tenants. Agathemer said that they had most dutifully presented themselves each morning to salute me and attend my reception, if I should be well enough to hold one; to ask after my progress towards recovery if I was not; that Ligo Atrior, as recognized leader among them, had also come each evening between bath-time and dinner-time to ask personally after my condition; that, as all the physicians had, the day before, stated that I must by no means be allowed to see anyone save Tanno or to leave my bedroom, for some days, he had told Ligo the evening before not to diminish his and his fellows' time for sight-seeing by coming on this particular morning; that Ligo had expressed his unalterable intention of coming each evening in any case.

I commended Agathemer's discretion but told him to tell

Ligo, when he came in the afternoon, that I intended to hold a reception next morning and wanted to see all nine of them at it.

I then asked about Murmex. Agathemer said that Tanno had offered to bring him to the Emperor's notice, but that Murmex had declined, thanking him, but remarking that, as I had offered to bring him to the Emperor's notice, it would be bad manners on his part to appear under the countenance of any other patron and would moreover be inviting bad luck instead of good luck on his presentation.

Agathemer said Murmex had called twice to ask after me and had told him where he lodged. I instructed him to apprise Murmex of my intention to hold a morning reception. I knew Agathemer would send out notifications to all my city clients of long standing without any admonition of mine.

He told me that no message of any kind had come from Vedia nor from Vedius Vedianus, the head of her clan, nor from Satronius Satro. I could not conjecture just why Vedia had remained silent, and I was not only worried over the fact of her silence and aloofness, but felt myself wearied, even after a very short time, by the uncontrollable turmoil of my mind, puzzling as to why she had ignored me.

As to Vedius and Satronius, I was vividly aware of their state of mind and acutely wretched over it.

Only nineteen days before I had seen my *triclinium* walled and floored with flowers presented by the local leader of one clan; had seen my dinner table groan under the fruit sent me by the local leader of the other clan, had known that both clans were competing for my favor and that I was high in the good graces of each.

Now I felt that all men of both clans must be bitterly incensed with me, for I knew their clan-pride. No man of either clan would weigh the facts: that neither fight had been of my seeking; that both fights had been forced on me; that I could not by any exercise of ingenuity have avoided either, once the onset began; that each had been the result of the headlong impetuosity and self-deception of my assailants, that both were the outcome of conditions which I could

not be expected to recognize as dangerous beforehand, of a mistake not of my causing, for which I was in no way to blame. I knew that every man of both clans, and most of all the head of each clan, would consider nothing except that I had participated in a roadside brawl in which men of their clan had been roughly handled, some of them by me personally, and from which their men had fled in confusion, routed partly by my participation.

I saw myself embroiled with both clans, conjectured that the two fights were the staple of the clan gossip on both sides, and that animosity against me was increasing from day to day. I felt impelled to state my case to both Vedius and Satronius, but I knew that even if I had been in the best of health, even if I should be eloquent beyond my best previous effort, there was little or no chance that anything I might say would avail to placate either magnate or to abate either's hostility toward me. And I knew that, in my dazed condition, the chances were that I would bungle the simplest mental task.

Yet I formed the purpose of attempting, that very morning, to see both Satronius and Vedius, and of attempting, if I was admitted to either, to convince him that he had no reason to be incensed with me, but that he should rather be incensed against my assailants: an aim impossible of attainment, as I knew, but would not admit to myself.

As I was to have no reception that morning I lay abed a while longer, at Agathemer's earnest solicitation.

Little good it did me. In my mind, behind my shut eyelids, I rehearsed the unfortunate occurrences on the road, I groped back to their causes.

I could see that Tanno's jesting replies to the Satronians he had met on the road had given them the idea that Xantha was being conveyed, in a shut litter, to Villa Vedia: similarly his quizzical words to the Vedians he had met had given them a similar notion that Greia was being smuggled behind slid panels and drawn curtains, to Villa Satronia.

The men of each side had spread their conjecture among their clansmen. Each side had made the forecast that the

abductors would try to carry off their prize to Rome: each had calculated that the other side would try to fool them, that they would not travel the obvious road, but try to escape by boldly following the route least to be expected. So the Vedians inferred that the Satronians, instead of taking their direct road to the Salarian Highway, would expect an ambush along it and would try to sneak through Vediamnum. Therefore they were in ambush at Vediamnum. Similarly and for similar reasons the Satronians were in ambush below their road entrance, calculating that the Vedians would pass that way.

I had blundered on both ambushes in succession.

I lay, eyes closed, raging at my lack of foresight and at my hideous bad luck.

When Agathemer knew that I could not be kept longer abed he brought me a cup of delicious hot mulled wine and a roll almost as well-flavored as Ofatulena's, for my town cook was fit for a senator's kitchen. I lay still a while longer.

When I stood up I felt dizzy and faint, but I was resolved and stubborn. Besides, I craved fresh air and thought that an airing would revive me. In fact, once out of doors and in my litter, with all Uncle's sliding panels open, I felt very much better. I told my bearers to take me to the Vedian mansion.

There the doorkeeper, indeed, stared, and the footmen nudged each other, but I was received civilly and was shown into the atrium, which I found crowded with the clan clients and with gentlemen like myself.

The atrium of the Vedian mansion had kept, by family tradition, a sort of affectation of old-fashioned plainness. It was indeed lined with expensive marbles, but it was far soberer in coloring, far simpler in every detail, than most atriums of similar houses. Instead of striving for an effect of opulent gorgeousness by every device of material, color and decoration, the heads of the Vedian family had expressed, in their atrium, their cult of primitive simplicity.

Compared with others of the houses of senators their atrium appeared bare and bleak.

His guests gazed at me curiously as I advanced to greet our host.

Vedius, the smallest man in the throng, stood blinking at me with his red eyelids, his bald head shining from its top to the thin fringe of reddish hair above his big flaring ears, his small wizened face all screwed up into a knot, his thin lips pursed, his little ferret eyes, close-set against his mean, miserly nose, peering at me under their blinking red lids.

His expression was malign and sneering, his tone sarcastic, but his mere words were not discourteous.

"I am delighted to see you, Andivius," he said, "and very much amazed to see you here.

"I have been told that on the eighth day before the Ides, you entered Vediamnum early of a rainy morning, with an escort so numerous that none could have conjectured that the cavalcade was yours; that, when three or four of the inhabitants of the village accosted you civilly and asked who you were and where you were going, your men, without any reply, fell on them and beat them unmercifully; that, when the population of Vediamnum rushed to the assistance of their fellows, your convoy set upon them and started a pitched battle, mishandling them so frightfully that the street was strewn with stunned and bleeding villagers; that you not only participated in the affray, but fomented it and led it; that the two men who have since died, fell under blows from your own quarter-staff.

"Now, the fact that I see you here leads me to conjecture that, after the occurrences which I have rehearsed, you would not have presented yourself before me and come to salute me, had you not had some version of these events other than that uniformly reported to me. If you have any version differing from those which I have heard, speak; we listen."

I had begun to feel dizzy and faint just as soon as I was indoors, I seemed dazed and as if my faculties were numb; at his ironical mock-courtesy I felt myself hot and cold all over. Yet I essayed to state my side of the case.

I explained all the circumstances, narrated Tanno's unexpected arrival, his quizzical bantering of the persons whom he encountered on the road, my tenants' petition, my agreement with Marcus Martius, the accretion of Hirnio and Murmex to our party, Tanno's insistence on reaching the Salarian Highway through Vediamnum, and all the other trivial factors which had conspired to my undoing; I described the affray in Vediamnum, both as I had seen it and as Tanno and Agathemer had told me of it; similarly the fight below Villa Satronia. I thought I was lucid and convincing.

When I paused Vedius leered at me.

"Andivius," he said, "I am not such a fool as you take me for. I am not in any way deceived by all that rigmarole. I see through you and your words as I saw through your actions. I comprehend perfectly that you connived with the Satronians to entice my people into a roadside brawl to discredit our clan. I understand how ingeniously you made all your arrangements, even to concocting a sham fight with the Satronians to enable you to put forward the excuses you have offered.

"Your plans miscarried at only two points: you did not mean to leave any corpses, yet you caused the deaths of two of my retainers; you did not mean to suffer anything yourself, yet in your sham fight you were accidentally hit on the head.

"Blows on the head often unsettle the intellect. I take that into consideration in dealing with you. If you go home now and recover from your injury your mind will clear. Then you will have wit enough to decide how soon and how often it will be advisable for you to return here!"

His labored sarcasm was entirely intelligible. I bade him farewell as ceremoniously as I could manage.

He silkily said:

"I have a bit of parting advice for you, Andivius. The climate of Bruttium is far better than that of Rome or Sabinum in promoting a recovery from any sort of illness; it is also far more conducive to long life. If you are wise

Rome will not see you linger here, nor will either Sabinum or Rome see you return; a word to the wise is enough."

Somehow I reached my litter. I understood his implied threat and saw endless difficulties and perils confronting me.

At the Satronian mansion the lackeys were insolent and it needed all Agathemer's tact and self-control, and all mine to browbeat them into admitting me.

As much as possible in contrast with the Vedian atrium was the Satronian atrium, a hall decorated as gorgeously, floridly and opulently as any in Rome; fairly walled with statues almost jostling in their niches, so closely were the niches set; and all behind, between and above them ablaze with crimson and glittering with gilding; every inch of walls and ceiling carved, colored, gilded and glowing.

Satronius was similarly in contrast with Vedius, a man tall, bulky, swarthy, rubicund and overbearing.

No finesse about Satronius, not a trace.

From amid his bevy of sycophants and toadies, over the heads of his fashionably garbed guests, he towered, his face red as a beacon, his big bullet head wagging, his great mouth open.

He roared at me:

"What brings you here, with your hands red with the blood of three of my henchmen? No Greek can outdo you in effrontery, Andivius. You are the shame of our nobility. To force your way into my morning reception after having killed three of my men in an unprovoked assault on them on the open road on my own land!"

I kept my temper and somehow kept my head clear, though it buzzed, and I kept my feet though I seemed to myself to reel. I spoke up for myself boldly and, I thought, expounded the circumstances and my version of the brawls even better than I had to Vedius.

To my amazement Satronius, in more brutal language, all but duplicated what Vedius had said to me, only reversing the clan names. He was convinced that I had assaulted his men by prearrangement with the Vedians, after a mock fight with them at Vediamnum.

I saw I was accomplishing nothing and endeavored to escape after a formal farewell.

Satronius roared after me:

"You left three corpses on the roadway below my villa. I'll not forget them nor will any man of my name. If you have sense you'll keep away from Sabinum, you'll get out of Rome, you'll hide yourself far away. My men have long memories and keen eyes. There'll be another corpse found somewhere by and by and the score paid off."

I laughed mirthlessly to myself as I climbed into my litter. I had, in fact, embroiled myself hopelessly with both sides of the feud.

Then my men carried me to the Palace.

The enormousness and magnificence of the great public throne-room had always overwhelmed me with a sense of my own insignificance. On that morning, chagrined at my reception by Vedius and Satronius, weak, ill and tottering on my feet, needing all my will power to stand steadily and not reel, with my head buzzing and my ears humming, feeling large and light and queer, I was abased and crushed by the vastness and hugeness of the room and by the uncountable crowd which thronged it.

Necessarily I was kept standing a long time in the press, and, in my weakened condition, I found my toga more than usually a burden, which is saying a great deal.

I suppose the toga was a natural enough garment for our ancestors, who practically wore nothing else, as their tunics were short and light. But since we have adopted and even developed foreign fashions in attire, we are sufficiently clad without any toga at all. To have to conceal one's becoming clothes under a toga, on all state and official occasions, is irritating to any well-dressed man even in the coldest weather, when the weight of the toga is unnoticed, since its warmth is grateful.

But to have to stew in a toga in July, when the lightest clothing is none too light, is a positive affliction, even out of doors on a breezy day. Indoors, in still and muggy weather, when one is jammed in a throng for an hour or two, a toga

becomes an instrument of torture. Yet togas we must wear at all public functions, and though we rage at the infliction and wonder at the queerness of the fate which has, by mere force of traditional fashion, condemned us to such unconscionable sufferings, yet no one can devise any means of breaking with our hereditary social conventions in attire. Therefore we continue to suffer though we rail.

If a toga is a misery to a strong, well man, conceive of the agonies I suffered in my weakened state, when I needed rest and fresh air, and had to stand, supporting that load of garments, the sweat soaking my inner tunic, fainting from exhaustion and heat.

I somewhat revived when Tanno edged his way through the crowd and stood by me. We talked of my health, he rebuking me for my rashness in coming out so soon, I protesting that I was plenty well enough and feeling better for my outing.

There we stood an hour or more, very uncomfortable, Tanno making conversation to keep me cheerful.

I needed his companionship and the atmosphere he diffused. For in addition to my illness and the circumstances I have described, I suffered from the proximity of Talponius Pulto, my only enemy among my acquaintances in the City. I had seen him once already that morning, in the Vedian atrium, where he had stood beside Vedius Vedianus, towering over his diminutive host, for he was a very tall man. Now, in the Imperial Audience Hall, he was almost a full head taller than any man in the press about him, so that I could not but be aware of his satirical gaze.

He was a singularly handsome man, surpassed by few among our nobility, and I had remarked how he dwarfed Vedius, how he made him appear stunted and contemptible. He had a head well shaped and well set, curly brown hair, fine and abundant, a high forehead, wide-set dark blue eyes, a chiseled nose, a perfect mouth and a fine, rounded chin. His neck was the envy of half our most beautiful women. His carriage was noble and he always looked a very distinguished man.

I could never divine why he hated me, but hate me he had from our earliest encounters. He derided me, maligned me and had often thwarted me from, apparently, mere spitefulness.

As I knew his evil gaze on me I now, in my weakened condition, somehow felt unable to bear it.

Yet I was somewhat buoyed up, as I stood there, by a recurrence of thoughts which I had often had before under similar circumstances. Most men of my rank seemed to take their wealth and position as matters of course. I never could. I have, all my life, at times meditated on my good fortune in being a Roman and a Roman of equestrian rank. While waiting in the great Audience Hall of the Palace, especially, the emotions aroused by these meditations often became so poignant as almost to overcome me, on this day in particular. As I viewed the splendor of the Hall and the gorgeousness of the crowd that thronged it, my heart swelled at the thought of being part of all that magnificence. It thrilled me to feel that I had a share and had a right to a share in Rome's glory.

The Emperor was busy with a succession of embassies, delegations and so on, and, as far as I could see, was in a good humor and trying to appear affable and not to seem bored.

After the deputations were disposed of the senators passed before the throne and saluted the Prince. Commodus barely spoke to most of them; it seemed to me, indeed, that he said more to Vedius and Satronius than to any other senators.

Then came the turn of us knights, far more numerous than the senators. The ushers positively hurried us along.

To me, to my amazement, the Emperor spoke very kindly.

"I am delighted to see you here today, Hedulio," he said. "And I am sorry that I have no time for what I want to ask you and say to you.

"I have heard of your illness and I know how it originated. Galen told me you ought to keep your bed for days yet. Are you sure you are well enough to be out?"

"I think it is doing me good, your Majesty," I replied. "Your words are, I know."

"If you feel too ill to come here tomorrow," he said, "I'll hold you excused, but in that case send a message early. I want you here tomorrow, specially, come if you can.

"Meanwhile, tell me, has coming here to-day tired you? Can you stay longer?"

"I certainly can," I replied, elated at his notice.

"Then stay here till this tiresome ceremonial is over," he said, "and accompany me to the Palace Stadium. I have some yokes of chariot horses to look over and try out, and some new chariots to try. I want you there. I may need your advice."

Flattered, I felt strength course through my veins and fatigue vanish. I passed completely round the lower part of the room and, with Tanno, took my stand near the south-eastern door, by which he would pass out if on his way to the Stadium.

Few senators passed through that door with the party of which I was one, the invitations being based on horsemanship and good fellowship, not on wealth, social prominence or political importance.

In the Stadium, of course, it was not only possible but natural to sit down and Tanno and I took our seats in the shade and as far back as our rank permitted.

I was amazed to find how much I needed to sit down, what a relief it was, and to realize how near I had been to fainting. In the breezy shade I soon revived and felt my strength come back.

From my comfortable seat I watched one of those exhibitions of miraculous horsemanship of which only Commodus was capable.

The Palace Stadium, of course, is a very large and impressive structure and its arena of no mean extent. But compared, not merely with the Circus Maximus, but with the Flaminian Circus or Domitian's Stadium it seemed small and contracted.

In this comparatively cramped space Commodus, divested

of his official robes and clad only in a charioteer's tunic, belt and boots, performed some amazing feats of horsemastery.

The pace to which he could speed up a four-horse team on that short straight-away, his ability to postpone slowing them down for the turn, and yet to pull them in handily and in time, the deftness and precision of his short turns, the promptness with which he compelled them to gather speed after the turn, these were astonishing, enough; but far more astonishing were his grace of pose, his perfect form in every motion, the ease of all his manoeuvres, the sense of his effortless control of his vehicle, of reserve strength greatly in excess of the strength he exerted; these were nothing short of dazzling. His pride in his artistry, for it amounted to that, and his enjoyment of every detail of what he did and of the sport in general, was infectious and delightful. I felt my love of horses growing in me with my admiration for so perfect a horseman, felt the like in all the spectators.

Team after team and chariot after chariot he tried out.

Meanwhile Tanno and I, seated comfortably side by side, varied our watching of Commodus and our praises of his driving with talk of my embroilment with both sides of the feud, with rehearsing to each other the unseen missteps which had led me into such a hideous predicament, and with discussions of what might be done to set me right with both clans. Also he described again to me what had occurred on the road after I was knocked senseless and rehearsed his version of both fights, I commenting and telling him what I recalled.

"What occupies my thoughts most," he said, "is that statuesque horseback informer planted by the roadside in the rain. What in the name of Mercury was he doing in your Sabine fog so early on a wet day?"

I was unable to make any conjecture.

For some time Commodus was almost uninterruptedly on the arena, making his changes from team to team, with scarcely an instant's interval. When he lingered under the arcade at the starting end of the Stadium Tanno remarked:

"We had best join the gathering. Do you feel sufficiently rested?"

I stood up and, for the first time that day, did so without any dizziness, lightheadedness or weakness in my knees. I felt almost myself.

Under the arcade we found Commodus explaining the merits of a new chariot made after his own design. It was a beautiful specimen of the vehicle-maker's art, its pole tipped with a bronze lion's head exquisitely chased, the pole itself of ash, the axle and wheel-spokes of cornel-wood, all the woodwork gilded, the hubs and tires of wrought bronze, also gilded, the front of the chariot-body of hammered bronze, embossed with figures depicting two of the Labors of Hercules; every part profusely decorated and the whole effect very tasteful.

Commodus ignored all these beauties entirely and discoursed of its measurements.

"Come close, Hedulio," he commanded, "this is just what I wanted you for."

The jockeys, athletes, acrobats and mimes about him made way for Tanno and me and some other gentlemen.

"I have always had very definite theories of chariot construction," Commodus went on. "I hold that the popular makes are all bad; in fact I am positively of the opinion that the tendencies in chariot building have been all in the wrong direction for centuries. They have followed and intensified the traditions from ancient days, when chariots were chiefly used for battle and only once in a while for racing.

"For battle purposes chariots, of course, were built for speed and quick turning, but after that, to avoid upsets. When a man was going to drive a pair of half-wild stallions across trackless country, over gullies and boulders, through bushes, up and down hill, often along a gravelly hillside, he saw to it that his chariot would keep right side up no matter how it bounced and tilted and swerved. He made sure that his axle was long, his wheels far apart, and their spokes short, so that his chariot-bed was as low as possible. He was right.

"But, after fighting from chariots was wholly a thing of the past in Italy and chariots were used, as they are used, for racing only, why cling to provisions for obsolete uses?

"A good general thinks of winning victories, not, like the fools I have disgracing me along the Rhine, of avoiding defeats. So a good charioteer ought to think, not of avoiding upsets, but of winning races. Yet all charioteers appear to want their vehicles as low built as possible, with short spoked wheels, wide apart on the ends of a long axle. That makes them feel safer on a short turn, and, so help me Hercules, I hardly blame them, anyhow. Besides, they all want to spraddle their legs apart and set their feet wide, so as to stand firm on the chariot bed, so they want the chariot body made as wide as possible.

"Now I don't need to plant my feet far apart when I drive. I believe I could drive on one foot and keep my balance. So I hold a broad chariot body is worse than unnecessary. More than that I maintain that the lower the axle is set, the less the team's strength goes into attaining speed. The lower the axle is set, the more sharply the pole slopes upward from the axle to the yoke-ring; the less of the team's energy goes into pulling the chariot along, the more of it is wasted, so to speak, on lifting the chariot into the air at every leap forward. The higher the axle is set, the nearer the pole is to being level, the less power is wasted on that upward pull and the more is utilized on the forward pull and goes to produce speed.

"Then again, I maintain that the farther apart the wheels are set the more one drags against the other, not only at the turns, where anyone can see the outer wheel drag on the inner, but at every swerve of the team on the straightaway. All such dragging reduces speed and tires the team with pulling which is energy utterly wasted.

"I hold the ideal racing chariot should have a chariot body as narrow as possible, not much wider than the width of the driver's hips; should have the wheels as close together as possible, to diminish the drag of one wheel against the other, should have the axle set as high as can be managed.

"All charioteers exclaim that such a chariot tends to overset. So it does. But I never have had an overset and I never expect to overset. I know how to drive and poise myself so as to keep my chariot right side up, and I never think of oversetting, I think of winning my race, and always do.

"Anyhow, here before your eyes, is my new racing chariot and of all the chariots ever made on earth this has the longest wheel-spokes, the highest-set axle, the closest-set wheels and the narrowest chariot body. Now I'm going to try it out and show it off."

He did to admiration, amid excited acclaims, his four cream-colored mares fairly flying along the straights and taking the turns at a pace which made us hold our breath.

After this thrilling exhibition he came back under the arcade and spoke to me first.

"Hedulio," he said, "you are one of the most competent horsemasters I ever knew. What do you think of my idea of the best form for a racing chariot?"

"I think," I said, "that it has all the merits you claim for it, but that not one charioteer in ten thousand could drive in it and avoid an upset, sooner or later, at a turn."

"Right you are!" he replied, "but I am one charioteer in ten thousand."

"Say in a hundred thousand," I ventured to add. "For surely you could not find, among all the professionals in the Empire, any other man to equal you in team-driving."

He beamed at me.

When we left the Palace Tanno saw me in my litter and insisted on following behind mine in his until he had seen me out of mine and into my own house.

There I had a very brief and very light lunch, Agathemer hovering over me and reminding me of Galen's orders for my diet, so that I found myself forbidden every viand which I craved and asked for, and limited to the very simple fare which had been prepared for me.

After lunch I went to bed and to sleep.

I woke soon and very wide awake. When I rolled into

bed I had felt so utterly done up with the excitement of my interviews with Vedius and Satronius, with the exertion of standing in the Throne-room and through the Emperor's lecture on chariot design, that I had renounced my intention of calling on Vedia and had resigned myself to postponing my attempt to see her until the morrow.

I woke all feverish energy and restless determination to go to see her at once. Therefore, between the siesta hour and the hour of the bath, I presented myself at Vedia's mansion.

I was at once ushered into her atrium, where I found myself alone and where I sat waiting some time.

When a maid summoned me into her *tablinum,* I found her alone, seated in her favorite lounging chair, charmingly attired and, I thought, more lovely than I had ever seen her.

"Oh, Caia!" I cried.

She bridled and stared at me haughtily.

"'Vedia,'" if you please, she said coldly. "You have no manner of right to 'Caia' me, Andivius."

The distant formality of her address, her disdainful tone, the affront of her words, chilled me like a dash of cold water.

"Caia!" I stammered, "Vedia, I mean. What has happened? What is wrong?" For I could not credit that she would be incensed with me because of my involvement in the affray in Vediamnum nor that she would condemn me unheard, especially as Tanno had told me, in the Stadium of the Palace, that he had taken care to call on Vedia, and give her his version of my mishap.

She glowered at me.

"Your effrontery," she burst out, "amazes me. I am incredulous that I really see you in my home, that you really have the shamelessness to force yourself into my presence! It is an unforgivable affront that you should pretend love for me and aspire to be my husband and all the while be philandering after a freedwoman; but that you should parade yourself on the high road with her all the way from your villa to Rome, with the hussy enthroned in your own travelling carriage, is far worse. That you should get involved in

roadside brawls with competitors for the possession of the minx is worse yet. Worst of all that you should advertise by all these doings, to all our world, your infatuation for such a creature and your greater interest in her than in me. I am indignant that I have considered marrying a suitor capable of such vileness, of such fatuity, of such folly."

I was like a sailboat taken all aback by a sudden change of wind. I could not believe my ears.

"I never took the slightest interest in Marcia," I protested, "except to keep my uncle from marrying her, after he set her free. She made eyes at me also, of course, for she made eyes at every marriageable man within reach. But I never had anything to do with her, never called on her by myself, never so much as talked to her alone. I went to her dinners, of course. All widowers and bachelors of our district went to her dinners. But her dinners were the pattern of propriety in every way. Your own grandmother's famous dinners were not more decorous. Except for being a guest, with others, at her dinners, I never was at her villa. I lent my carriage not to her but to her bridegroom, Marcus Martius, a prosperous gentleman of my neighborhood, of whom you have often heard me speak, a friend of my uncle's and a friend of mine since boyhood. The fights, as Tanno explained to you, had nothing to do with Marcia and her involvement in them was as accidental as mine."

Vedia did not look a particle mollified.

"You men," she said, "are all alike. You will philander about your nasty jades. But, at least, when you vow that you love one woman and one only, and use every artifice to induce her to marry you, you should feel it incumbent on you to keep away from such creatures as this Marcia of yours. But you must needs dangle about her and go to her dinners. That was bad enough. But, while wooing me, to arrange a mock marriage for her with a local confederate and then positively bring her to Rome with you was infinitely worse. I am insulted, of course. But, above and beyond your treachery to me, I am insulted at your bungling your clumsy intrigues and flaunting the minx in the face of

all the world and setting all fashionable Rome to gossiping about you and your hussy and to wondering how I am going to act about it.

"I'll show them and you how I am going to act! I'm angry at your double-dealing; at your lies I am furious. I hate you. I hope I'll never set eyes on you again. The sooner you are gone, the better I'll like it. And I'll give orders to ensure your never darkening my doors again!"

I tried to argue with her, to persuade her, to convince her, to induce her to listen to me.

She raged at me.

Dazed, I groped my way to my litter and, once in it, lost consciousness entirely, not in a faint, but in the sleep of total exhaustion.

As I rolled into my litter, feeling utterly unfit to enjoy a bath with any natural associates, I had ordered my bearers to take me home.

There I rested a while, for I waked before I reached home. Then I bathed, ate a simple dinner, alone with Agathemer, and went at once to bed.

CHAPTER VII

A RATHER GOOD DAY

I SLEPT soundly all night but woke at the first appearance of light. I lay abed, my mind milling over my situation, over Vedia's unexpected jealousy of Marcia, over the absurdity of it, over her illogical but impregnable indignation and over the equally baseless but similarly unalterable hostility of Vedius and Satronius.

I concluded to try again to placate all three. It seemed to me I could recall many omissions and infelicities in what I had said to both magnates, while in dealing with Vedia I seemed to myself to have been tongue-tied and fragmentary.

After the bit of bread and hot mulled wine which I did

not crave, but which Agathemer insisted on my taking according to Galen's orders, I held a brief morning reception. My nine farmer-tenants were all present, all pathetically and touchingly glad to see me again about, even old Chryseros Philargyrus.

They had a petition to prefer, namely, that I should give them permission to leave Rome and return home, jointly and severally, just as soon as they pleased. Ligo Atrior acted as spokesman and said that they had come provided for a month's stay, as I had ordered, but they felt that they could see all the sights of Rome which would interest them before the month was out, and some sooner than others. Moreover they felt that although they had left their farms in the best of condition and in faithful hands, yet their desire to return home would soon overcome their interest in sight-seeing and would grow more overmastering daily.

I readily accorded what they asked.

Murmex Lucro was there, and his appearance of superhuman strength impressed me even more than on the road. I bade him meet me at the Palace, and instructed him by which entrance to approach it and at what portal and precisely where to take his stand in order that I might not miss him. Agathemer suggested that I detail one of my slaves to act as his guide and I did so.

My salutants disposed of without hurry and to the last man, in spite of Agathemer's protests, I ordered my litter.

At the Vedian mansion I was refused admission. Agathemer and even I argued and expostulated, but the doorkeeper said he had explicit orders not to admit me, and the four big Nubians flanking the vestibule, two on a side, looked capable of using muscular force on any would-be intruder and appeared eager for a pretext for hurling themselves on me.

I climbed back into my litter.

As my men shouldered it, the doorkeeper or some one of his helpers made the mistake of unchaining the watch-dog at me.

He was a big, short-haired, black and white Aquitanian

dog. He flew at the calves of my bearers, snarling, and would have bitten them badly had I not half rolled, half fallen from my litter, almost into his jaws; in fact, not a foot in front of him.

As all such animals always do with me, he checked, cowered, fawned and then exhibited every symptom of recognition, delight and affection. I patted him, pulled his ears, smoothed his spine and climbed back into my litter. The dog took his place under it as naturally as if I had raised him from a puppy and kept neatly underneath it, all the way to the Satronian Mansion.

There, at sight of me, as I descended from my litter, the doorkeeper loosed his big fawn-colored Molossian hound at me. And he came in silence, but his lips wrinkled off his teeth, swift as a lion and looking in fact as big as a yearling lioness and not unlike one in outline and color.

The Aquitanian from under the litter flew at him with a snarl, the Molossian replied with a louder snarl, the two dogs clinched and tore each other, snarling, and hung to each other, worrying and growling and snarling, to the delight of my bearers.

Out of the Satronian mansion poured a small mob of footmen, lackeys and such house-slaves. But not one dared approach the two dogs. At a safe distance they watched the fight.

I seized the dogs, spoke to them, quieted them, separated them and when I ordered them, they lay down side by side under the litter.

I climbed in.

As my bearers shouldered the litter, the Satronian doorkeeper came forward and said truculently:

"That is our dog under your litter."

"Is he your dog?" I retorted. "Prove it! Take hold of him."

The doorkeeper tried and the Molossian snarled at him. He called the footmen to help him.

At that somehow, I both lost my temper and felt prankish.

"Chase 'em, Terror," I called. "Chase 'em, Fury!"

It was a wonder to see the Aquitanian obey, to see the Molossian obey was a portent.

Into the mansion scuttled the doorkeeper, the footmen, the lackeys, the hangers-on, the two dogs barking at their heels.

I called them off in time to forestall any lacerated ankles, and still more marvellously they obeyed instantly, checked, withdrew to under the litter and there paced, side by side, to Vedia's home.

There, also, I was denied admission, but urbanely, the porter asserting that his mistress was not at home.

While I was questioning the porter, who was becomingly respectful, a bevy of Vedian retainers, house-lackeys and other slaves, overtook me, demanding the return of the Aquitanian watchdog.

"Take him!" I said, "take him if you can!"

The boldest of them approached the dog, calling him by name and wheedlingly. When he was but a yard or so away the dog flew at his throat and almost set his fangs into it, for they snapped together a mere hand's breadth short.

The fellow recoiled and, when the dog followed like an arrow from a bow, took to his heels, his companions with him, and they ran helter-skelter down the street, the dog pursuing them to the corner of the Carinae, and returning, his tongue hanging out, his tail wagging, with all the demonstrations of a dog who feels he has done his full duty and has earned approbation.

Hardly had he returned when a band of Satronians appeared and a similar scene was enacted, with the Molossian as chief actor.

When the last Satronian had vanished round the corner of the thoroughfare I reëntered my litter and we set off for the Palace, both dogs sedately pacing side by side underneath.

At the Palace portal Agathemer had no difficulty in locating Murmex, even in the crowd which packed all approaches to that entrance. I spoke to the centurion on duty at the

portal and to the head out-door usher, meaning to arrange that Murmex should be let in among the first when the commonality were admitted after the senators and knights had paid their duty to the Emperor. To my amazement the head usher looked at a list or memorandum which he had in his hand and said:

"You are Andivius Hedulio, are you not? You are to take in with you anybody you please, to the number of ten. Caesar has given special orders about you." Murmex therefore passed in with me and took up a position in the lower part of the Audience Hall, where I could send a page to summon him if my plans worked out as I hoped.

We were early and the vast public throne-room almost empty. Tanno joined me after I had stood but a short time and not long afterwards the Emperor entered, just as a fair crowd of senators had assembled.

The formal salutation began at once and I noticed that the Emperor said something personal to Vedius and that Vedius stepped out of the line of salutants and took up a position behind the Emperor on his left. Similarly he spoke to Satronius, who similarly took his station behind the Emperor on his right.

When, in the long line of my equals, in an Audience Hall now jammed to the doors, I drew near to the throne, I felt a growing embarrassment at seeing the Emperor flanked by my two enemies. But, when I made my salutation, to my amazement, the Emperor took my hand and leaned over and kissed me as if I had been a senator.

"I love you, Hedulio," he said, "and I am proud of you. I have heard very laudatory reports of you. My agents all agree in reporting that you have, in very difficult circumstances, done your utmost to avoid giving offence to any of your neighbors in Sabinum, and that, if you have given offense, it was not your fault. They also agree in reporting that, mild and peaceful as you are by disposition, you know how to defend yourself when attacked, that you are not only a bold and resolute man in a tight place, but resourceful and prompt, a hard and quick hitter, and what is

more, a past master at quarter-staff play. I love brave men and good fighters. I commend you."

He turned ironically to Vedius and asked:

"Did you miss any part of what I have just said to Andivius? I meant you to hear every word of it."

Vedius, his mean face lead-gray, bowed and said:

"Your Majesty was completely audible."

Then Commodus similarly questioned Satronius. He, his big face brick-red, his eyes popping out, seemed half strangled by his efforts to speak.

"I could hear it all," he managed to say.

"You two stand facing me," Commodus commanded. "Stand on either side of Andivius."

They so placed themselves with a very bad grace.

The Emperor raised his voice.

"Come near, all you senators," he commanded. "I want all of you to hear what I am about to say and to be witnesses to it."

Everybody, senators, knights and commoners crowded as close to the throne as etiquette and the ushers would allow.

"Now listen to me," spoke Commodus. "You know I hate all sorts of official business and should greatly prefer to put my entire time and energies on athletics, horsemanship and swordsmanship, archery and other things really worth while. I make no secret of my love for the activities at which I am best and of my detestation of my duties.

"But, just because I hate my duties, it does not follow that I neglect them. A lot of you think I do. I'll show you you are not always right, nor often right. Just because I surround myself with wrestlers and charioteers and gladiators and other good fellows, not with senile self-styled philosophers, prosy and with unkempt beards and rough cloaks, as my father did, half of you think I am incapable of being serious, or haven't intellect enough to understand government or sense enough to care for the Empire.

"You are mightily mistaken. I realize the importance of my responsibilities and the magnificence of my opportunities. I hate routine, but I know well the value of our

Empire and that I, as Prince of the Republic,* have a bigger stake in it than any other citizen of our Republic. I am not wholly absorbed in the joys of practicing feats of strength and skill. I put more time on governing than you think.

"I am autocrat of our world, and I know how to make my influence felt when I choose. I have very positive views about fighting. Fighting has to go on, on the frontiers of the Empire. My army can keep off our foes, but it cannot kill off the Moorish and Arab and Scythian nomads, nor the hordes of the German forests and the Caledonian moors. The Marcomanni and the rest will claw at us. There must be fighting on the frontiers. It is proper that there should be fighting where necessary, on any frontier, and corpses scattered about.

"Also corpses are in place on any arena of any amphitheatre anywhere inside our frontiers; fighting inside amphitheatres is proper and seemly.

"But I will tolerate no fighting inside our frontiers outside the amphitheatres. I'll not condone any corpses on the pavement of any street or on the road of any highway or byways. I'll not permit any battles, set-tos, affrays or brawls in towns or villages or on roads. You hear me? You hear me, Vedius? You hear me, Satronius? You hear me, all of you?

"Now it so happened that I had heard of your disgraceful Sabine feud, which mars the peace of a whole countryside near Reate, and I had sent a competent and reliable agent with four assistants to investigate and report. For once luck was with me: generally my luck as a ruler is as bad as it is good for me as an athlete. It so happened that my agents had just completed their preliminary investigations and acquainted themselves with general conditions when your idiotic feud broke loose in two abductions of women, one by each side, that put my agents on their mettle. They kept awake. They are no fools. My head man has a keen scent for incipient trouble; he managed to have one of his helpers get among the ambushers in Vediamnum and another among those on your byway, Satronius. Each of

* See Note A.

these two severally heard all the talk of the ambushers with whom he mingled; so I have had a faithful report of just what the Vedian ambush meant to do to the Satronian convoy they lay in wait for and similarly of the other side. Each was waiting for a sheep; both caught a wildcat. If the men in the ambushes had had any eyes or any sense, no fight would have occurred. As it was they got no more than they deserved. Hedulio was set on without provocation and merely defended himself and his associates as any self-respecting free man would. I have no fault to find with Hedulio. I take you all to witness.

"Now that disposes of what is past. As to the future I shall tolerate no illegalities of any kind anywhere in the City, in Italy or in the Empire. You'll see. Dr. Commodus will cure this epidemic of lawlessness which afflicts the Republic. You'll see my agents run down, catch and bring to punishment the ingenious rascals who have been amusing themselves by masquerading as Imperial Messengers, scampering across the landscape for the fun of the thing, eating lavish meals at my cost, running the legs off my best horses, lodging luxuriously in the best bed at every inn they stop at, showing forged papers, or showing none at all, using no other means than effrontery and assurance. I'll have them stopped. I'll stop them. And I'll quell, I'll squelch this outburst of banditry of which we have too much. I'll see that my agents hunt down and capture and execute these highwaymen who rob not only rich travellers, but government treasure-convoys, who even rob Imperial Messengers. A pretty state of affairs when my couriers are fair game alike for impostors and robbers. I'll make the slyest and the boldest quail at the idea of interfering with one of my despatch riders and I'll exterminate all highwaymen. I'll have no one swaggering up and down Italy, now in Liguria, now in Apulia, mocking the law and its guardians, looting as he pleases, uncatchable, untraceable, hidden and helped by mountaineers and farm-laborers and farmers, even welcomed secretly in villages and towns, acclaimed as King of the Highwaymen, until songs are made on him and

sung even in Rome. He'll soon decorate a gibbet, impaled there and spiked there too. You'll see. And still less will I tolerate lawlessness among men of property and position. The past actions of you magnates I dislike. As to the future I may say that my agents were at your morning reception yesterday, Vedius, and heard and reported your covert threats to Hedulio: likewise two were at your house, Satronius, and heard and reported your open threats.

"Now I perfectly understand what you two implied. You threatened Andivius with assassination, if he returned to his estates in Sabinum or if he so much as remained in Rome.

"Beware! Be warned! Take care! I am easy-going enough, but I am Cæsar and I'll brook no trenching on my personal prerogatives or my legal authority. I have the tribunician power for life, I am commissioned thereby to forbid anything in the Republic and to see to it that no magistrate or citizen oversteps the limits of what is permitted him. By your threats to Hedulio you practically arrogate to yourself the right to exile a Roman of equestrian rank. Banishment is a governmental power and a prerogative of Cæsar. I'll have no magnates of such overweening behavior. I am jealous of my prerogatives, more than jealous!

"I know what you intend and what you can accomplish by your henchmen. I comprehend that hundreds of stilettos are being sharpened, up there in the Sabine Hills, and down here in the slums, for a chance at Hedulio.

"Now I can do much by legal authority and more by personal prerogative. Be quick. Pass the word swiftly to all your satellites, here and in Sabinum. Let them all know that if Andivius Hedulio dies by poison or violence or is injured by any weapon, you two at Rome and your brother at Villa Vedia and your son, Satro, at Villa Satronia, will not see two more sunrises. I know how to enforce my will and well you know that. Your lives are in pawn for his, let all your clansmen know in good time.

"And more: if you dare, either of you, to move against Hedulio in any court at Reate or elsewhere in Sabinum for

his participation in the brawls which you fomented and he fell into, I shall see to it that not your influence dominates any trial, but evenhanded justice, jealously watched over by my best legal advisers. You know what that means to you."

The Emperor spoke with a sustained, white-hot fury and it was comical to watch Satronius and Vedius, as I did by sidelong glances when the Emperor's eyes were not on my face.

When he stopped, both magnates bowed low and each in turn expressed his loyal submissiveness.

The Emperor dismissed them with a wave of his hand. To me he said:

"That will keep you alive, Hedulio and, I trust, help you to get back into good health. Horrible bore, these small-size local matters; worse, if anything, even, than the maintenance of the Rhine frontier. I loathe all this routine. But my agents serve me pretty well. Besides putting me in touch with all this feud idiocy they have incidentally informed me that you brought to Rome with you a son of Murmex Frugi, also a nephew of Pacideianus, and a pupil of both, who has come to Rome to try his luck at their former profession. Did you bring him here today? I hoped you would."

"I did," I answered, "and thanks to your orders, I was able to pass him in with me. He is in this hall now."

"Fine!" cried the Emperor, "and how about your nine tenants, who stood by you so well in both fights. Did you bring them too?"

"I should never have so presumed," I stammered, amazed. "It would never have entered my head to ask entry here for such simple rustics. I should have anticipated your wrath had I so far forgot myself."

"Rustics," said Commodus, smiling, even grinning, "who can fight as I am told your tenants can fight are always to my mind. Bring them here tomorrow, if you like. I'll see them in the Palæstra. I'm going there today after this function is finished. Bring your swordsman there. You

know the door. I have given orders to admit you in my retinue."

In the Palæstra Tanno cheerfully presented Murmex to some of his favorite prize-fighters and he stood talking with them, they appraisingly conning the son of Murmex Frugi.

Tanno and I seated ourselves well back on the middle tier of the spectators' benches and chatted until the Emperor should have returned from his dressing-room and should seem at leisure to notice us.

"You must not be too puffed up at your good luck of today," Tanno warned me.

"In fact, I advise you to be very wary and to comport yourself most modestly. You know Commodus. It has too often happened that when he has overwhelmed a courtier with favors, his very condescension seems to cause a reaction in his feelings and he becomes insanely suspicious. Respond promptly to all his suggestions, of course, but do not obtrude yourself on his notice. In particular ask no favor of him for a long time to come."

I thanked him for his advice and assured him that I most heartily agreed with his ideas.

Presently a page summoned me, and Tanno came, too.

Commodus had rid himself of his official robes and was now clad only in an athlete's tunic and soft-soled shoes. I presented Murmex and the Emperor questioned him, as to his age, his upbringing, his father's years in retirement at Nersæ, as to Pacideianus and put questions about thrusts and parries designed to test his knowledge of fence.

Then he seated himself on his throne on the little dais by the fencing-floor and had Murmex called to him, made him stand by him, and asked his opinion of several pairs of fighters whom he had fence, one pair after the other.

Appearing pleased with the replies he elicited he bade Murmex go with one of the pages, rub down and change into fencing rig. While Murmex was gone he viewed more fencing by young aspirants matched against accredited Palace-school trainers.

When Murmex returned he had him matched with the

best of these tiros. But, almost at once, he called to the *lanista:*

"Save that novice! Murmex will kill him, even with that lath sword, if you don't separate them."

He then had Murmex pitted against a succession of experts, each better than his predecessor. Murmex acquitted himself so brilliantly that Commodus cried:

"I must try this man myself."

He stood up and stepped down from the dais. Then he spent some time in selecting a pair of cornel-wood fencing-swords of equal length and weight and of similar balance, repeatedly hefting the sword he had chosen and repeatedly asking Murmex whether he was satisfied with his sword, whether it suited him; and similarly of the choice of shields.

When they faced each other they made as pretty a spectacle as I had ever seen: Murmex stocky, so burly that he did not look tall, square-shouldered, deep-chested, vast of chest-girth, huge in every dimension and yet neither heavy nor slow in his movements; Commodus tall, slender, sinewy, lithe and graceful, quick in every movement and amazingly handsome.

They had made but a few passes when Commodus exclaimed:

"You show your training: it is some fun to fence with you."

After not many more thrusts and parries he called out:

"Be on your guard! I'm going to attack in earnest."

There followed a hot burst of sword-play and when both adversaries were out of breath and stepped back and stood panting, Commodus praised Murmex highly.

"You have the best guard I have ever encountered," he said, "steady-eyed, cautious, wary yet quick too, and always with the threat of attack in your defense. You are a credit to your training."

When they stepped forward again Commodus commanded:

"Attack now, attack your fiercest and show your quality. I shall not be angry if you land on me, I shall be pleased. Do your utmost!"

After the second bout he said:

"You are most dangerous in attack. At last I have found a man really worth fencing with. You gave me all I could do to protect myself. You are a pearl!"

He looked round at the envious faces of more than two score seasoned professionals and addressed the gathering at large.

"We have here a man who is nephew of Pacideianus and son to Murmex Frugi, trained since infancy by both. No wonder he is a marvel. I have never faced a swordsman who gave me so much trouble to protect myself or who held off my attacks so easily and completely. He is the only man alive, so far as I know, really in my class as a fencer."

As he was eyeing the assembly to note their manner on receiving this proclamation his expression changed.

"Egnatius!" he called sharply. "Come here!"

Egnatius Capito came forward. Like Tanno and myself he was conspicuous since he was in his toga, most of those present being athletes and clad for practice.

"I did not notice you among your fellow senators at my levee," said the Emperor.

"I was not there," Egnatius admitted. "I had a press of clients at my own levee this morning and reached the Palace just in time to hear what you had to say to Vedius and Satronius. I tried to catch your eye as you passed out, but you did not notice me at all."

"I had rather see you here than in the throne-room," Commodus said. "I am told that you have let your tongue run entirely too wild in talking of me lately. If I had not been also told that you had had too much wine I should animadvert on your effrontery officially. As it is I prefer to prove you wrong before these experts and gentlemen."

"Of what have I been accused?" Capito queried, steadily.

"There has been no accusation," Commodus disclaimed. "But I have been told that, at more than one dinner, you have been fool enough to say that I am only a sham swordsman, that I take a steel sword and face an adversary whose

sword has a blade of lead: that it is no wonder that no one scores off me, and that I run up big scores in all my bouts."

"If I ever said anything like that," spoke Capito boldly, "I was so drunk that I have no recollection of having said it. And I am a sober man and a light drinker. Also I have never harbored such thoughts unless too drunk to know what I thought or said."

"You are cold sober now, aren't you?" Commodus queried.

"Entirely sober," Egnatius agreed.

"And you are a fencer far above the average?" he pursued.

"I have been told I have no mean skill," said Capito modestly.

"Such being the case," said Commodus, "you and I shall fence. Go with the attendants and change into fencing kit. You'll find all styles and sizes of everything needed in the dressing-rooms. First pick out a pair of cornel-wood swords, entirely to your mind."

When Capito had selected a pair of swords which suited both him and the Emperor, he went off to change. While he was gone Commodus had the armorer drill a tiny hole near the point of one sword and insert in it one of those thorn-like little steel points which are commonly used on the ends of donkey-goads.

When Capito returned he showed him the two swords. Capito looked up at him questioningly and amazedly.

"The idea is this," Commodus explained. "I mean to demonstrate my perfect ability to defend myself, as well as my dangerousness in attack. You are to use the sword with the goad point set in it; so that, if you succeed in hitting me, you will tear a long slash in my hide; for I am going to fence with you in my skin only, stark, mother-naked as I was born. I shall use the unaltered sword and you will have on your fencing-tunic, so that if I hit you, it won't hurt you nearly as much as a hit from you will hurt me.

"If you draw blood from me, I'll pay you one hundred thousand sesterces: if I fail to lay you out on the pavement, totally insensible, in three bouts, I'll pay you two hundred

thousand sesterces. You can pick any *lanista* here to judge the fight and tell us when to separate and rest."

Capito, cool enough, indicated Murmex as referee.

"He's not a *lanista*," Commodus objected.

"He's Frugi's pupil," Capito maintained, "and therefore the best *lanista* here."

"I agree," said Commodus, and he called:

"Who's the physician on duty?"

When the official came forward he said truculently:

"Get your plasters ready and your revivers. You'll have to attend a man flat on the pavement, insensible and with a bad scalp wound, before much time has passed."

And actually, though Capito fenced well, he was no match for Commodus.

The bout was worth watching. The adversaries were just the same height and differed little in weight. Capito seemed more compact and steady; Commodus more lithe and agile. Capito was a handsome man and made a fine figure in his scanty, leek-green fencing tunic. Commodus, always vain of his good looks, delighted in exhibiting himself totally nude, not only because he loved to shock elderly noblemen imbued with old-fashioned ideas of propriety, but also because he rightly thought himself one of the best formed men alive. He was fond of being told that he was like Hercules but, except in the paintings of Zeuxis, Hercules has always been depicted as brawnier and more mature than Commodus was then or ever became, to his last hour. To me he suggested Mercury, especially as he appears in the paintings of Polygnotus, or Apollo, as Apelles depicted him.

Besides the grace and good looks of the two, they fenced very well, Capito correctly and with good judgment, Commodus with amazing dash and originality.

Capito, though bold, was wholly unable to touch Commodus, while Commodus slashed him, even through his tunic, till his blood ran from a dozen scratches. Before the second bout was well joined Capito was felled by a blow on the head, which laid him flat and insensible, bleeding from a terrible scalp wound.

After Capito had been carried off by the attendants, the Emperor, wrapped in an athlete's blanket, talked a while to Murmex and then went off to bathe, for he bathed many times a day.

Set free, I went out and was helped into my litter. The two dogs were still by it, took their places under it as if they had belonged to me since puppyhood and under it trotted as I returned home. Once home I ate the lunch permitted me and had an hour's sound, dreamless sleep.

I woke feeling so well that I sent for Agathemer, bade him have my litter ready and told him I was going to the Baths of Titus.

Inevitably Agathemer protested that I was not well enough; naturally I insisted and, of course, I had my way.

As with court levees, I have never been able to take as a matter of course without wonder and admiration, the marvellous spectacle afforded by an assemblage of our nobility and gentry gathered for their afternoon bath in any of our splendid Thermæ. Of these I hold the Baths of Titus not only the most magnificent, which is conceded by everybody, but also I hold them the most impressive mass of buildings in Rome, both outside and inside, and surpassing in every respect every other great public building in the city. Most connoisseurs appraise the Temple of Venus and Rome as our capital's most splendid structure, but I could never bring myself to admit it superior to or even equal to the Baths of Titus. To enter this surpassing building, always congratulating myself on my right to enter the baths and use them; to be one of the courtly throng of fashionable notables resorting to them: I could never take these things as a matter of course.

Nor could I ever take as a matter of course the sight of the bulk of Rome's nobility, gentlemen and ladies together, thronging the great pools and halls or roaming about the corridors, passage-ways or galleries, all totally nude.

Social convention is an amazing factor in human life. One may say that anything fashionable is accepted and that anything unfashionable is banned. But that does not help

one to explain to one's self the oddity of some social conventions.

Oddest of all our Roman social conventions is the contrast between the insistence on complete concealment of the human figure everywhere else and the universal acceptance of its display at the Thermæ.

At home, if receiving guests, on the streets, at a formal dinner, at Palace levees, at the Circus games or in the Amphitheatre, a man must be wrapped up in his toga. Any exposure of too much of the left arm, of either ankle, is hooted at as bad form, is decried as indecent.

So of our ladies, on dinner sofas, on their reclining chairs in their reception rooms, in their homes, in their litters abroad, at the Amphitheatre or at the Circus games, from neck to instep they are muffled up. If one catches a glimpse of a beauty's ankle as she goes up a stair, one is thrilled, one watches eagerly, one cranes to look.

Yet one encounters the same beauty the same afternoon in a corridor of the Baths of Titus, with nothing on but a net over her elaborate coiffure and the bracelet with the key and number of the locker in which the attendant has put away her clothing and valuables and one not only cannot stare at her, one cannot look at her, not even if she accosts one and lingers for a chat.

I have pondered over this, the most singular of our social conventions, and the most mandatory and inescapable; and the more I ponder the more singular it seems.

Yet it is real, it is a fact. One meets the wives of all one's friends, the wives of all Rome's nobility, naked as they were born; they mingle with the men in the swimming pools, in the ante-rooms, in the rest-rooms, everywhere except in the shower-bath cabinets and the rubbing-down rooms; one swims with them, lounges with them, joins groups of chatting gentlemen and ladies, chats, goes off, and all the while one cannot, one simply cannot stare at a nude woman, any more than any of the women ever stares at any man.

It is a social convention. But not the less amazing, although a fact.

One not only cannot scrutinize a woman, one cannot scrutinize a group of women, even at a distance, even all the way across a swimming pool. So, hoping to encounter Vedia in the gathering, I yet could not look for her.

I had met and talked with many of my acquaintances, notably Marcus Martius and his bride Marcia.

Marcia, rosy as the inside of a sea-shell, with her gold hair confined by a net of gold wire, was a bewitching creature, if I had been able to let my eyes dwell on her.

She was as contained and slow spoken and soft-voiced as always, but she was, for her, notably complimentary as to my share in the two fights; thanked me warmly for defending her, declared that she would certainly have been carried off, either as Xantha or Greia, or as a hostage for one or the other, if I had not fought "like both the Dioscuri at once," as she phrased it.

Martius corroborated her opinion of my services to them and thanked me warmly.

Delayed by chats with friends and acquaintances, held up by distant acquaintances and even by persons hardly known to me by sight, who congratulated me on the Emperor's public championing of me against my powerful Sabine neighbors, I felt my strength ebbing and sometimes saw a gray blur between my eyes and what I looked at.

I was, in fact, so weak that I nearly fainted when, unseen in the swarm of bathers until he was close to me, I encountered Talponius Pulto, tall, handsome, disdainful, sneering and malignant as usual. From his proximity I escaped as unobtrusively as I could and as promptly.

The cold douche and a swim in the cold pool had revived me. Also, in the cold pool I had encountered Nemestronia, still personable enough at eighty-odd to mingle daily with her social world, as nude as they, and enjoy herself thoroughly. Yet, at her age, she knew she looked better when under water, and spent most of her time in the pools. She and I did some fancy swimming together, while she questioned me about my health.

I did not spend any more time than I could help between

the cold pool and the tepid pool; no more at least than importunate acquaintances exacted of me.

In the tepid pool I felt, somehow, weaker and more relaxed than at any time since I had gone out the previous morning. The effect of the Emperor's favor, the effect of the cold plunge, were wearing off: mind and body were losing tone. I swam languidly, alone, on my back and so swimming found myself about one third of the way from the upper end of the pool and about midway of its width. I was staring up at the panels of the vaulting, relishing the beauty of the color scheme, the gold rosettes brilliant against the deep blue of the soffits, set off by the red of the coffering.

So swimming and staring my eyes roamed downward to the great round-headed coved window above the gallery. The railing of the gallery had a sort of wicket in it, by which bathers could emerge one by one on to the bracket-like platform which overhung the pool at that end, for use as a take-off for a high dive.

Suddenly, on this diving-stand, poised for her dive, outlined against the window behind her, I recognized Vedia; Vedia, my angered sweetheart, rosy as Marcia, more lovely, and nude as Venus rising from the sea.

Seeing her thus, and seeing her thus unexpectedly, woke in me a volcanic outburst of conflicting emotions altogether too much for my weakened condition.

I fainted.

When I came to I felt weak and queer and did not at first open my eyes. I heard subdued voices all about me, as of an interested crowd; I felt all wet, I felt the cold of a wet mosaic pavement under me, but my head and shoulders were pillowed on a support wet indeed, as I was, but soft and warm.

I opened my eyes.

I realized that my head was in Vedia's lap, for I saw above me her dripping breasts and, higher, her anxious face looking down at mine.

I fainted again.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WATER-GARDEN

JUST how long I was entirely unconscious I do not know. For after I began to come to myself at intervals which grew shorter, for periods which grew longer, I was too weak to move a muscle or to utter a syllable. I lay, flaccid, in my big, deep, soft bed, very dimly aware of Occo or of Agathemer hovering about me, generally recalled to consciousness by an eggspoonful of hot spiced wine being forced through my slow-opening lips and teeth.

How many times I was sufficiently conscious to know that I was being fed, but too ill for any thoughts whatever, I cannot conjecture. When I began to have mental feelings the first was one of dazed confusion of mind, of groping to recollect where I was and why and what had last happened to me.

When I recalled my last waking experience I lay bathed in sleepy contentment. I could think connectedly enough to reason out, or my unthinking intuitions presented to me without my thinking, the conviction that, if Vedia could recognize me in a big pool among scores of swimmers, if her perceptions in regard to me were acute enough and quick enough for her and her alone to notice that I had fainted in the water, if she cared enough for me and was sufficiently indifferent to what society might say of her, for her to rescue me and sit down on the pavement of the *tepidarium* and pillow my wet head on her wet thighs till I showed signs of life, I need not worry about whether Vedia cared for me or not. I was permeated with the conviction that, however difficult it might be to get her to acknowledge it, however great or many might be the obstacles in the way of my marrying her, Vedia loved me almost as consumedly as I loved her.

In this frame of mind I convalesced steadily, if slowly, incurious of the flight of time, of news, of anything; content

to get well whenever it should please the gods and confident that happiness, even if long deferred, was certain to follow my recovery.

After I could talk to Occo and Agathemer and seemed to want to ask questions, which both of them discouraged, one morning, on wakening for the second time, after a minute allowance of nourishment and a refreshing nap, I found Galen by my bedside.

He looked me over and asked questions, as physicians invariably do, concerning my bodily sensations. After he seemed satisfied he asked:

"My son, were you ever ill before you were hit on the head in your recent affrays?"

"Never that I remember," I answered.

"I judge so," he said. "If you had not been blessed with the very best physique and constitution you would have died in your friend's litter on the Salarian Highway. Thanks to your general strength and healthiness, and thanks, to some extent, to my care and that of my colleagues, you are alive and on the way to complete, permanent recovery and to long life with good health. But you very nearly committed suicide when you went out and about contrary to my orders. I say all this solemnly, for I want you to remember it. If you disobey again, you will, most likely, be soon buried. If you obey you have every chance of getting so well that you can safely forget that you ever were ill.

"But, until I tell you that you are well, do not forget that you are ill."

"I shall remember," I said, "and I shall be scrupulously obedient."

"Good!" he ejaculated. "I infer that you find life worth living."

"Very well worth living," I rejoined devoutly.

"Then listen to me," he said. "You must remain abed until I tell you to get up; when you first get up, it must be for only an hour or so. You must not attempt to go out until I give you permission. You must not risk eating such

meals as you are used to. You must take small amounts of specified foods at stated intervals. Agathemer will see to all that, with Occo to help him. Do you promise to acquiesce?"

"I promise," I said.

"Remember," he cautioned me, "that the number, variety and severity of the blows rained on you in your two fights were so great that you were almost beaten to death. You had no bones broken, but the injury to your muscles and ligaments was sufficient to kill a man only ordinarily strong, while the blows affecting your kidneys, liver and other internal organs were in themselves, without the bruising of all your surface, enough to cause death. I had you convalescing promptly and rapidly; you went out and overstrained all your vitalities. Your recklessness almost ended you. You were far nearer death in your relapse than at first, and that is saying a great deal. If you obey me you will certainly recover. If you disobey you will probably kill yourself."

"I shall take all that to heart," I said. "I have promised to be docile: I'll keep my word and obey my slaves as if every day were the Saturnalia."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You are getting better."

He looked me over again and asked:

"Is there anything you want?"

"I want to see Tanno," I said.

"You shall the day after tomorrow," he promised, "or perhaps tomorrow, if I find you improving faster than I anticipate."

Actually, after a brief visit from him the next day, Tanno was ushered into my sick-room.

My first question was about my tenants. Not one such tenant-farmer in a million would ever have a chance of being personally presented to Cæsar. They had been awe-struck when I told them of their amazing good fortune. They had said almost nothing. But I knew that they were, all nine of them, as nearly rapt into ecstasy as Sabine farmers could be at the prospect of personally saluting Cæsar in his

Palace, in his Audience Hall on his throne. I had been too inert to worry about anything, but I almost worried at the thought of their disappointment, through my relapse.

Tanno told me that he, knowing the Emperor's character pretty well, had taken it upon himself to have them passed in with him as the Emperor had ordered, and had himself asked permission to present them and had presented them. The next day, he said, everyone of them had returned home.

I heaved a deep sigh of relief: my tenants and my Sabine Estate were off my mind; I might be entirely easy about all things in Sabinum.

He then told me what a brilliant success Marcia was among the pleasure-loving, novelty-loving, luxurious high-living set in our city society.

"Since the enforcement of the old-fashioned laws relaxed and became a dead letter and some were even repealed," he said, "not a few men of equestrian rank have married freedwomen and such occurrences no longer cause any scandal or much remark. But the results are not generally productive of any social success for the ill-assorted pair.

"I have known a few freedwomen married to men of wealth and equestrian rank, who gained some vague approximation of social standing among the wives of their husbands' friends. But Marcia is the first freedwoman I ever knew or heard of to be treated, by everybody and at once, as if she had been freeborn and since birth in her husband's class. Martius has not brought this about, or aided much; he is a good enough fellow, but he has no social qualities; for all the power he has of attracting friends he might as well be an archaic statue. Marcia has done it all. She's a wonder."

Then he told me of Murmex: how he was already rated Rome's champion swordsman; how the Palace Palæstra was jammed with notables eager to see him fence, how magnates competed for invitations to such exhibitions, how Murmex was overwhelmed with attentions of all kinds from all sorts of people, had had a furnished apartment put at his disposal by one admirer, a litter and bearers presented him by another,

already saw his domicile crowded with presents of statuary, paintings, furniture, flowers and all possible gifts, how he was an immediate and brilliant success with all classes, even the populace talking of him, crowding behind his litter, and demanding him for the next public exhibition of gladiators.

That such luck had befallen a man whom I had presented to Court augured well for me, indubitably.

After I had been out of bed an hour or more for several consecutive days Galen said to me:

"You are almost well enough to be about, but not quite. If you go back to your habitual hours of sleep you will fret and fidget indoors, and you are not yet sufficiently recovered to resume your normal life. You need fresh air. I have considered what is best and what is possible. I have talked with your friend Opsitius. Through him I have arranged for you to have short outings in this manner. On fair days if you feel like going out you may call for your litter. In it you must keep the panels closed and the curtains drawn. Agathemer will give your bearers directions. Nemestronia has offered you the use of her lower garden. You are to have it all to yourself, whenever you want it, as long as my directions to Agathemer permit you to remain in it; and you need not remain a moment unless you enjoy being there."

I understood without asking any questions. Nemestronia's palace was one of the most desirable, magnificent and spacious abodes in Rome. Her father, who had been accustomed to say that he was too great a man to have to live in a fashionable neighborhood, that any neighborhood in which he settled would thereby become fashionable, had bought a very generous plot of land nearly on the crest of the Viminal Hill and had there built himself a dwelling which was at once noted among the dozen finest private dwellings in the Eternal City. In one respect it was preëminent. From its lofty position it had, down the slope of the hill, a wide view over the city and this view was unobstructed, for below his

palace Nemestronius had had laid out six separate gardens, two large and four small. Next the house the ground fell away so sharply that he had been able to create a terraced garden, the only private terraced garden in Rome, extending across the entire rear of his palace and with three terraces, from the uppermost of which the view was almost as good as from the upper windows of the mansion. Below this, each extending along but half the length of the terraces, was a grass-garden, where it was possible to play ball-games, it being a mere expanse of sward shut in by high walls covered with flowering vines; and a formal garden, in the fashionable style. Below the grass-garden was one of similar size, all flower-beds, to supply roses, lilies, violets and other staple blossoms for his banqueting-hall, below the formal garden was one called the wild-garden or shrubbery-garden, like the grass-garden in being covered with sward almost from wall to wall, but unlike it, in that it had four shade trees, no two alike, and many flowering shrubs of all kinds and sizes. Lastly below these two was the water-garden, the same size as the terraced garden, taken up with fountains and pools, and all gay in season, with the flowers which thrive in or beside ponds and pools. It had also eight beautiful lotus trees.

High walls, through which one might pass from one to the other only by gates generally shut fast, separated and enclosed these gardens, for their creator's intention was to enjoy the peculiar charm of each undistracted by the contrasting charms of the others. From the upper gardens it was possible to see, to some extent, into those lower down the hill; but, from the lower, one could see nothing of those above.

One side of the property was flanked by a street, a mere narrow, walled lane on which no dwelling opened. Along this were posterns in the wall, giving access to or exit from the terrace-garden, the formal-garden, the wild-garden and the water-garden.

I understood at once what I later heard from Agathemer. The water-garden was to be mine for my airings. I was to

leave my litter at its postern in the unfrequented lane and reënter my litter there.

There I went next day and revelled in the beauty of the garden, in the sunshine, in the breeze and in the sensations of returning health and strength which inundated me. There I went for some days in succession similarly.

On the eighth day before the Kalends of August Galen came to see me, not early in the morning, but about the bath-hour of the afternoon. He seemed well pleased with his inspection of me and with my answers to his questions.

"You are practically well," he said, "and much sooner than I anticipated. I am tempted to tell you to return to your normal routine of meals, eating what you please; and to give you permission to resume your usual social activities But I think it better, in a case like yours, to wait a month too long rather than to be a day too soon. So I shall enjoin an adherence to your diet and a continuance of your long rest hours and brief outings for some days yet."

He had me summon Agathemer and repeated to him much of what he had said to me.

"He might go out at once," he said, "but we had best be cautious. Limit him to morning outings in Nemestronia's gardens. He may, however, see friends, one at a time, according to his wishes and your directions. And be particular as to his diet. Give him more of each viand at each feeding. Feed him as soon as he wakes. Then time the feedings two hours apart. Are your *clepsydras** good?"

"Of the best," I interjected. "My uncle was a fancier of time-keepers and had one in every room, and no two alike in ornamentation, all beautifully decorated."

"The ornamentation doesn't matter," said Galen, impatiently. "Do they keep time with anything approaching accuracy?"

"As near accuracy," I said, "as any *clepsydras* ever made."

"Well," he said, "*clepsydras* always work better when nearly full than when nearly empty. When you feed him have a full *clepsydra* handy and start it when he begins to

* Water-clocks.

eat. Then by it feed him again after two hours. Keep to that interval and to the diet I have enjoined."

Next day I spent over three hours in Nemestronia's water-garden, Tanno with me for most of the time. Twice, during the chat, Agathemer brought me a tray with the drink and food enjoined for that hour of the day. Each time I left not a drop or crumb: I was ravenous.

The following morning Agathemer let in to me, in that same garden, Murmex Lucro, who thanked me for my good offices with Commodus and narrated his triumphal progress of professional and social success ever since I had seen him fence with the Emperor.

Agathemer did not permit Murmex to linger long, saying that it was against Galen's orders. After I was alone and had eaten what he brought I basked and idled happily, thinking of Vedia, entirely unruffled by the fact that I had had no missive or message from her, considering her silence merely discreet and judicious after her spectacular rescue of me in the *Tepidarium*, and confident of seeing her as soon as I was entirely well.

While I was in this mood my hostess came to chat with me. Nemestronia, at eighty-odd, was as dainty and charming an old lady as the sun ever shone on. And as lovable as any woman alive. I loved her dearly, as all Rome loved her dearly, and I ranked myself high among her countless honorary grandsons, for her motherly ways made her seem an honorary grandmother to all young noblemen whom she favored.

After a heart-warming chat she said:

"I must go now, by Galen's orders. Before I go I want to ask you whether you are coming here tomorrow?"

"Certainly!" I cried, looking about me with delight. "Could there, can there, be in Rome a more Elysian spot in which to feel health being restored to one?"

She beamed at me.

"Be sure to be here," she said. "You will not regret coming."

Between naps that afternoon and before I slept that night

I soothed myself with the hope that I was, by Nemestronia's influence, to have an interview with Vedia.

Next morning the weather was beautiful, the sky clear, the air neither too cool nor too warm, the breeze soft and steady. Nemestronia's water-garden appeared to me even more delightful than the day before. I admired the lotus trees, the water-lily pads in the pools, the jets of the fountains, the bright strips of flowers along the pools, particularly some water-flags or some flowers resembling water-flags.

I was idling in the sun on a cushion which Agathemer had arranged for me on a marble seat against the upper wall, nearly midway of the garden, but in sight of the postern gate by which I had entered. So idling and dreaming day dreams I let my eyes rove languidly about the scene before me. While meditating and staring at the pavement at my feet I heard footsteps on the walk and looked up.

To my amazement I saw Egnatius Capito approaching.

No wonder I was amazed. I knew him but slightly. I should never have thought of asking to see him, as I had asked to be allowed to see several of my semi-intimates. Agathemer had insisted that I postpone seeing them, because an interview with any of them was likely to overtire me. I knew that no one could have entered that garden without Agathemer's knowledge. I could not conceive how Capito came to be there.

He greeted me formally and asked permission to seat himself beside me. I gave it rather grudgingly.

He asked after my health and I answered only less grudgingly.

"I conjecture," he said, "that you are surprised to see me here?"

"I am surprised," I said shortly.

"Will you permit me to explain?" he asked courteously.

I could not be less courteous than he and signified my assent.

"Your secretary," he said, "is of the opinion that your illness, while caused by your injuries in the affrays into which you were entrapped, was greatly intensified by your

chagrin at finding yourself embroiled with both the Vedian and Satronian clans, and he also thinks that brooding over the condition of affairs has delayed your recovery."

"I assumed all that," I interrupted, "but I cannot conceive why he has talked to you about it."

Capito was always ingratiating. He gazed at me reproachfully, gently, winningly.

"If I have your permission," he said, "I shall explain."

"Explain!" I cried impatiently.

"Agathemer," he went on, "has left no stone unturned to find some means for placating both clans and for reconciling you with both. In pursuit of this aim he has been cautious, discreet, tactful and secret. He has covertly tried many plans of approach. It was intimated to him, truly, that I had on foot a scheme which promised to succeed in reconciling both clans with each other and he rightly inferred that I might be able to arrange for reconciling both with you at the same time. I am confident that I can, as I told him when he tentatively approached me and unostentatiously sounded me on this matter. I told him that it was only necessary that I have an interview with you as soon as might be. Believing that an early dissipation of your embroilment would conduce to your quick and complete recovery he arranged for me to meet you as I have."

While he was saying this my eyes roved about the garden. To my astonishment I saw a man standing against the shut postern door, intently regarding us as we sat on the marble seat conferring. In my half convalescent state I had become used to acquiescence in anything and everything, I was inert mentally and physically and my perceptive faculties dulled and slow as were my intellectual processes. While hearkening to Capito I gazed at the man uncomprehendingly, only half conscious. I thought him a queer-looking fellow to be in Capito's retinue; he did not look like a slave, but like a free man of the lowest class. I did not recognize him, yet it seemed to me that I should; I did not like the way he looked at us, yet I said nothing. He seemed to see me looking at him, opened the postern, stepped through it and

shut it after him. As he went I was shot through with the conviction that I had seen him somewhere before.

"If you have in you," I said to Capito, "any such supernatural powers as you would need for success in what you aim at, if you have any reasons for anticipating success, Agathemer was fully justified in what he has done. If you can really accomplish what you seem to believe you can accomplish, I shall be grateful to you to the last breath I draw. But I am skeptical. Speak on. Convince me."

"I must first," he said, "have your pledge of secrecy for what I am about to say."

"What sort of secrecy?" I queried, repelled and suspicious.

"If I am to disclose what I wish to disclose," he said, "you must give me your word not to reveal by word, look, act or silence anything I may make known to you, from your pledge until the termination of our interview."

I was uneasy, but curious. I gave my pledge as he asked.

He looked about, warily. He leaned closer to me. He spoke in a subdued tone.

"It must be known to you," he said, "that many of us nobles, many men of equestrian rank, many senators, are gravely anxious concerning the Republic, gravely dissatisfied with the character and behavior, I might say the misbehavior, of our present Prince."

"I don't wonder that you pledged me to secrecy," I blurted out. "You are talking treason."

"Hear me to the end," he begged, "and you will find that I am talking not treason but patriotism."

I grunted and he went on.

"Many of us are of the opinion that the Republic, which was never as prosperous as within the past eighty years, is in grave danger of losing much of its Empire, so gloriously extended by Trajan, so well maintained by his three successors, if it continues to be neglected and mismanaged as it is. To save the commonwealth and retain its provinces we must have a Cæsar competent, diligent, discreet and brave; and not one of these epithets can be properly applied to the autocrat now in power. We feel that he must be

removed and that there must be substituted for him a ruler who is all that the State needs and has the right to expect."

"Fine words," I said. "Masking a conspiracy to assassinate our Emperor."

He looked shocked and pained.

"Hear me out," he pleaded.

"I am curious, I confess," I admitted, "to learn what all this has to do with reconciling Vedius and Satronius and regaining me the good graces of both. I ought to terminate the interview, but I am weak. Go on."

"Naturally," he said, "both Vedius and Satronius resent what the Emperor did and said concerning your entanglement in their feud and they are both infuriated at their humiliation and at the effective means he took to tie their hands as far as concerns you and to ensure your safety, as far as they were concerned."

"Commodus," I interrupted, "is not altogether a bungler when he gives his mind to the duties of his office."

"May I go on?" Capito enquired, mildly, even reproachfully and, I might say, irresistibly. He was a born leader of a conspiracy, for few men could be alone with him and not fall under his influence.

"Go on," I said. "I am consumed with curiosity to discover how their rage at the Emperor could lead to a reconciliation between them."

"It is not obvious, I admit," he said, "but when I explain, you will see how naturally, how inevitably a reconciliation might be expected to result.

"You have seen, perhaps often, a peasant or laborer beating his wife?"

"Everybody has," I replied. "What has that to do with what you were talking of?"

"Be patient!" he pleaded. "You have seen some bystander interfere in such a domestic fracas?"

"Often," I agreed.

"You have also seen," he continued, "not only the husband turn on the outsider, but the wife join her spouse in attacking her would-be rescuer, have seen both trounce the

interloper and in their mutual help forget their late antagonism."

"Certainly," I agreed.

"Well," he pursued, "human nature, male or female, low-life or high-life, is the same in essence. Vedius and Satronius are so incensed with Cæsar for balking their appetite for revenge on you that they are thirsting for revenge on Cæsar and ready to forget all their hereditary animosities and join in abasing him. In fact, they have joined the league of patriots of which I am the leader. And they are so bent on their new purpose that they are ready to be hearty friends to anyone sworn as our confederate. I can arrange to obliterate, even to annihilate forever, all trace of enmity between you and either of them, if you will but agree to let your natural inherent patriotism overcome all other feelings in your heart and aid us to abolish the shame of our Republic and to safeguard the Commonwealth and the Empire."

All this while I had been half listening to him, half occupied in trying to recall where I had seen the man who had stepped through the postern. At this instant, as Capito paused, I suddenly realized that he was the immobile horseman whom we had twice passed in the rain by the roadside the morning I had started from my villa for Rome. His hooked nose was unmistakable.

Somehow this realization, along with the recollection of what Tanno had said of the fellow, woke me to a sense of the danger to which I was exposed by being with Capito and also to a sense of the craziness of his ideas and plans.

I felt my face redden.

"You have said enough!" I cut him short. "I perfectly understand. You think yourself the destined savior of Rome and the deviser of priceless plans for Rome's future. You are not so much a conspirator as a lunatic. Your schemes are half idiocy, half moonshine. I have pledged you my word to be secret as to what you have told me. My pledge holds if you now keep silent, rise from this seat and walk straight out to your litter, by the same way by which you came from it. If you utter another syllable to me, if you

do not rise promptly, if you hesitate about going, if you linger on your path, I'll call my litter, I'll go straight to the Palace, I'll ask for a private audience, I'll wait till I get one, I'll tell the Emperor every word you have said to me. If you want protection for yourself from my pledge, leave me. Go!"

He gave one glance at me and went.

CHAPTER IX

THE SQUALL OF THE LEOPARD

WHEN he was gone, when I had seen the postern door shut behind him, I felt suddenly weak and faint. I was amazed to find how exhausted I was left by the ebbing of the hot wave of indignation and rage which had surged through me as I revolted from his absurd and contemptible proposals. I felt flaccid and limp.

At this instant Agathemer brought me a tray of food. My impulse was to burst out at him with reproaches for having, without consulting me, presumed to arrange for me an interview with a man not among my intimates. But I was so enraged that I dreaded the effect on me, in my weakened state, if I let myself go in respect to rebuking my slave. I kept silent and was mildly surprised to find myself tempted by the food. I ate and drank all that was on the tray, and Agathemer vanished noiselessly, without a word.

I sat there, revived by the food and wine, feeling the weakness caused by my rage gradually passing off and meditating on the sudden change in my condition. Before Capito accosted me I had felt perfectly well and was looking forward to resuming my normal life next day, to going to the Palace Levee, to enjoying a bath with my acquaintances at the Thermæ of Titus. Since Capito had left me I had felt so

overcome that I was ready to look forward to some days yet of strict regimen and isolation.

Thus meditating I was again aware of footsteps on the walk.

I looked up and was more amazed than when I had caught sight of Capito. Approaching me, but a few paces from me, was one of the most detestable bores in Rome, a man whom I sedulously avoided, Faltonius Bambilio. His father, the Pontifex of Vesta, was an offensively and absurdly unctuous and pompous man. His son, who had already held several minor offices in the City Government, had been one of the quæstors the year before, and so was now a senator. But he was, as he always had been, as he remained, a booby. I do not believe that there was any man in Rome I detested so heartily.

He greeted me as if he had a right to my notice and said:

"I was told that Egnatius Capito was in this garden."

"He was," I replied curtly, "but he has left it."

"I certainly am disappointed," he said, seating himself by me, uninvited. "I particularly wanted to speak to Capito at once."

"You might find him at his house," I suggested.

But Bambilio was impervious to suggestions.

"I wanted to talk to him and you together," he said, "but that can be managed some other time."

I was about to reply tartly, but I remembered how my irritation with Capito had affected me and recalled Galen's injunction that I must avoid all causes of excitement and emotion. I held my peace.

Bambilio, as if he had been an intimate and had been specially invited, lolled comfortably on the bench and gazed approvingly about.

"Fine garden, Andivius," he said. "Fine trees, fine flowers and I say, what a jewel of a slave-girl, eh! Hedulio!"

I could have hit him, I was so incensed at his familiarity. I was already choking with internal rage at Agathemer for having let anyone in to talk to me in that garden, still more

at his having done so without consulting me and most of all that after doing so he had not made sure that no one but Capito could pass the postern door. But I almost exploded into voluble wrath when I looked where he indicated, saw a pretty, shapely young woman in the scanty attire of a slave-girl picking flag-flowers into a basket she carried, and recognized Vedia. That Agathemer's presumption should have spoiled the interview with Vedia which she and Nemestronia had manifestly arranged for us, that it should have exposed Vedia in her undignified disguise to recognition by the greatest ass and blatherskite in the senate, this infuriated me till I felt internally like Aetna or Vesuvius on the verge of eruption.

Vedia, for it was she, had evidently been approaching me circuitously, hoping to be noticed and hailed from afar. Now when she was near enough for not merely a lover but for any acquaintance to recognize her, she looked up at me over her basket as she laid a flower-stalk in it.

Instantly her face flamed, she turned away and went on picking flowers diligently. After she had moved a few steps she sprang into the path and scampered off like a child, her basket swinging, vanishing through a door in the upper wall on my left.

"Neat little piece!" Bambilio commented. "Taking, and every part of her pretty. Fine calves, especially."

I was by this time in a condition which, had I been old and fat, must have brought on an apoplexy. But my hot rage cooled to an icy haughtiness, and, though it took a weary, tedious long time, I kept my temper and my demeanor, look, tone and word, managed to convey to him, even through the thick armor of his self-conceit, that he was not welcome. He rose, said farewell and waddled off to the postern. As soon as he was outside, more rapidly than I had moved since I was felled in the roadside affray, I walked to that door and made sure that it was bolted.

I was strolling unhurriedly back to the seat I had left and was perhaps half way to it, when I heard, loud and clear, the long-drawn, blood-curdling hunting-squall of Nemestro-

nia's pet leopard; heard in it more of menace, more of adult ferocity, more of the horrible joy of the power to kill than I had ever heard before.

Instantly I comprehended what had happened. Either Agathemer when he took off my tray or Vedia when she escaped had passed through the wild-garden (probably it had been Vedia, who would not know that the leopard was confined there), and had left a door imperfectly closed. The leopard, which might have been asleep, under the shrubberies and invisible, had roused and had passed through the unfastened door up into the terrace-garden. This was the kind of morning on which Nemestronia would have many visitors, the kind of weather which would tempt them to have their chairs out on the upper terrace, the hour of the morning at which they would be most likely to be out there. The leopard, I instantly inferred, was stalking, not some hare, porker, kid or lamb, but her owner and her owner's guests.

I disembarrassed myself of my outer garments, threw off my sun-hat, and, clad only in my shoes and tunic, sprinted for the door into the wild-garden, through it, through its upper door, which, as I had forecasted, I found open, and out on the lower terrace. From there I could not see anything on the upper terrace, but, as I cleared the door, I heard again, rising, quavering, sinking, rising, the leopard's hunting cry from the upper terrace. I sprang up the stair to the middle terrace, and half way up that to the upper; but, when my head was about on a level with the pavement of the walk along the upper terrace, I checked myself and moved a hairsbreadth at a time; for the rescue on which I had come was a delicate task and any quick movement might precipitate the leopard's killing-spring.

Through the spaces between the yellow Numidian marble balusters I saw what I had anticipated. Partly under the big middle awning, but mostly out in front of it on the walk, were set a score of light chairs. On those furthest out were seated nine ladies: Nemestronia, Vedia, Urgulania, Entedia, Aemilia Prisca, Magnonia, Claudia Ardeana, Semnia, Papiria and Cossonia. They were rigid in their chairs,

white with terror and yet afraid to move a muscle. Belly flat on the walk, about twelve paces from them, crouched the leopard, moving forward a paw at a time. As I gained a view of her she emitted a third squall.

I saw that I was in time and felt so relieved that I almost fainted in the revulsion from my agony of anxiety. As I began to move my mind was free enough to wonder how Vedia had found time to change from her slave-girl disguise into a bewitching fashionable toilet. Among those leaders of Roman society, the very pick of Rome's noblewomen, she showed her best and outshone them all.

I moved evenly and steadily up the steps and along the balustrade till I was past the crouching leopard and then on round till I was in her line of sight and half between her and her victims.

She recognized me at once, the evil switching of her tail ceased, she half rose; she began to purr, a purr that sounded to me as loud as the roar of a water-fall in a gorge; she took a few steps towards me, then, suddenly, she made a peculiar movement hard to describe, something like the curvetting of a mettlesome colt, but characteristic of a leopard and therefore like the movement of no other animal save a leopard or lion or tiger; she leapt daintily clear of the pavement and struck sideways with her forepaws. The antic perfectly expressed playful delight and friendliness.

I recognized her mood and knew that I had not only distracted her from her bloodthirst but had her entire attention. I knew what I must do, but I raged at the ridiculous exhibition which I must make of myself before the most fastidious and conventional of Rome's noblewomen. Yet, if I was to save them, I must not hesitate. I threw myself flat on my side on the pavement and made clawing motions with my hands and feet, the leopard responded to my suggestion, capered again as before and, when close to me, lay down before me on the pavement and began to paw at me, purring loudly in her throat, now and then snarling softly. She played with me as she had often played before, all her claws sheathed and her paws soft as thistledown; mumbling

my hands and forearms in her hot mouth, slavering over them, yet never so much as bruising the skin with her needle-sharp teeth. Yet I seemed to detect a subtle difference in her mood and, from moment to moment, dreaded that she might claw me to ribbons or sink her fangs in my shoulders or face.

All the while she was mouthing, pawing and kicking me I was raging at Agathemer for having put me in a position where I had to make so undignified an exhibition of myself before such an assemblage.

Presently I recognized that alteration in her mood which made it possible for me to rise, take her by the scruff of the neck, and lead her off to her cage.

When I had her inside I realized how hot, sweaty, dusty tousled, rumpled and mussed I was. Her cage was under the vaulted arcade beneath the second terrace. I was, when I shot its bolts, altogether out of sight of Vedia, Nemestronia and the other noble ladies who had been spectators of my tussle with the leopard. I did not want them to see me again in my dishevelled and dirty condition: I sneaked into the house by the passage from the arcade into the cellars and up the scullery stairs, made the first slave I saw escort me to the guest-room I usually occupied when at Nemestronia's and bade him summon bath-attendants and dressers. Nemestronia had a store-room lined with wardrobes of men's attire containing every sort of garment of every style and size. I was soon clean and clad as a gentleman should be in a fresh tunic and in the garment I had left in the water-garden, which a footman had fetched for me.

Then I went out on the upper terrace.

There I found the nine ladies, with some maids and waiters. Before the ladies, facing Nemestronia, stood Agathemer; behind and about him Nemestronia's six big, husky, bull-necked slave-lashers, the two head-lashers with their many-lashed scourges.

I realized at once what had happened. Nemestronia had needed no one to inform her that it was through Agathemer's negligence or mismanagement that the leopard had escaped

from the wild-garden. She had not waited to ask me to investigate the matter and punish my slave. She had, like the great noblewoman she was, assumed my acquiescence and approval and summoned and questioned Agathemer. Before I appeared his answers had convicted him. She did not look round at me as I joined the group and seated myself in a vacant chair on her left, between Vedia and Claudia Ardeana. As I seated myself she gave the order:

"Strip him and give him a hundred lashes!"

Now, then and there I found myself in the most cruel and painful situation I had ever been in my life. Agathemer and I had been playmates almost from our cradles; comrades, cronies, chums all our lives. Neither of us had ever had a brother. Each had been, since infancy, a brother to the other. I could not have loved a real brother any more than I loved Agathemer, nor could he have had more implicit confidence in the goodwill of a blood brother. I was, in fact, as solicitous for Agathemer's welfare as for my own and I rejoiced with his joys and mourned with his griefs. I would have done anything to protect him and save him, as he had faithfully and tirelessly nursed and cared for me in my illness.

But I knew that no explanations could ever make Nemestronia understand our mutual relations or accept my views of them; to her a slave was a slave; she felt as unalterable a gulf between free man and slave as between mankind and cattle. I could only let her have her way, though I was inundated with misery at the thought of Agathemer's approaching agonies. I had been hotly wrathful with him and had meditated, as I dressed, what sort of punishment would befit his fault: now that Nemestronia had ordered him flogged my resentment against him had all oozed out of me and I was filled with sympathy for him and scorn of my cowardice in not protecting him. I glanced at him as the lashers stripped and bound him. He sent back at me a glance which said, as plain as words:

"I am to blame. I know you are sorry for me. But give no sign, I must go through this alone."

And I had to sit there while the head-lasher flogged him till the pavement on which he lay was all a pool of gore, till his back was in tatters from neck to hips, till he was carried off, insensible, perhaps dead.

Also I had to express my approbation of Nemestronia's orders, and had to sit there and chat with the ladies, seven of whom were inclined to be facetious over the figure I had cut sprawling on the mosiac walk, tussling with that abominable leopard. They thanked me for saving their lives, or at least, the life of some one of them. But they were sly about my comical appearance while the leopard mauled and tousled me.

Two did not speak.

Vedia was cold and mute and spoke only when she rose, excusing herself to Nemestronia and calling for her litter first of them all.

Nemestronia was so weak from the reaction after her fright and so unwilling to display her weakness that she hardly spoke, limiting herself to the brief words courtesy demanded.

When I reached home I forgot everything else in my solicitude for Agathemer. I not only called for my own physician, but sent urgent messages summoning Galen and Celsianus. Celsianus was affronted at the suggestion that he stoop to prescribe for a slave and incensed at having been called in haste for such a trifle: but Galen, who came in while Celsianus was expressing his indignation, diverted his mind at once by rejoicing that I was sufficiently recovered to take that much interest in one of my slaves. He made haste to see, inspect and assist Agathemer: when he was somewhat relieved and we had left him abed with Occo to watch him and with injunctions that quiet was the best medicine for him, Galen turned to me.

"You have had a shock," he said, "and a superabundance of excitement. Tell me all about it."

When I had told him what had happened, omitting only Vedia's disguise and her presence in the water-garden, he said:

"I certainly should not have prescribed any such excite-

ments and efforts as medicaments for a case like yours. But it sometimes happens that being startled accomplishes more towards a cure than long rest can. Your perturbation of mind and activity of body has cured you. You are, as far as I can judge, well. I am of the opinion that you may safely eat and drink what you like in moderation, rest only as you please and may resume your normal life."

I was, naturally, much pleased, but had no impulse to resume my habits that day. I kept indoors, denied myself to all visitors, slept long after Galen had left, ate a moderate dinner and went early to bed.

Next day I went through the normal routine of a Roman of my rank. The story of the leopard had been noised about and the husbands of the ladies concerned every one came to salute me at my morning reception and to thank me for my miraculous intervention, as they called it. As six of the eight were senators my atrium had an aspect seldom seen at the reception of a man of equestrian rank.

At the Palace I found the tale of the leopard had reached the ears of the Emperor. He congratulated me, saying:

"You are not only a good fighter, Hedulio, but also incredibly bold and marvellously favored by the gods."

Tanno was at the Palace to say farewell for the summer, as he was off for Baiæ to enjoy the scenery and sea-breezes.

"I envy you," said Commodus. "I must remain here many days yet to get rid of the most pressing matters on my crowded files of official papers."

After the Palace levee was over I went to Vedia's mansion and tried to see her, but was rebuffed, the porter declaring that, by her physician's orders, she was denying herself to all visitors.

At home I found Agathemer still suffering terribly, but without fever, with no sign of proud flesh anywhere on his flayed back and not only entirely able to talk to me but eager to do so. We had a long talk on the entire subject of our peculiar relations as a master and slave who were more like brothers. He assured me that I had done just right to act

as I had and he begged my pardon for his blunders in arranging to have Capito admitted to talk to me, in arranging it without my permission or even knowledge, in neglecting to guard the outer door of the garden and so admitting Bambilio, and in causing the escape of the leopard. I heartily forgave him, told him to forget all that, that I forgot it all and, on my side, begged his forgiveness for his agonies. He said there was nothing to forgive: that my uncle's injunctions had compelled my leaving him a slave and the rest had been his fault, not mine.

I told him that I would do anything in my power to make him well, comfortable and happy, except setting him free, from which I was restrained by my uncle's behests.

He asked to be allowed to return to Villa Andivia as soon as the physicians pronounced him fit to travel.

I agreed: commanded that my travelling carriage, which Marcus Martius had returned to me, should be put in order and prepared for the journey; and consulted Galen, who came of his own accord to see Agathemer two days in succession. On his third visit he gave Agathemer permission to travel by carriage the next day and he accordingly set off for Villa Andivia on the Ides of August.

Each day I had spent most of my afternoon at the Baths of Titus. Each afternoon I had seen Vedia at a distance, but she had always taken pains to avoid me, and one cannot pursue or seem to pursue, a lady in the Thermæ.

Each day, also, I had called to see her at her house; each day I had been rebuffed. On the morning of the nineteenth day before the Kalends of September one of the runners brought me a letter. It read:

"Vedia gives greetings to Andivius. If you are well I am well also."

But this formal opening altered at once to familiar writing.

"You are acting like a silly boy. As things are, both in my cousins' clan and in that of my late husband, I cannot receive you at my house, and you ought to have sense enough to realize that without being told. Be patient and I shall

arrange for an interview with you. Please avoid me at the Baths, as I have you.

"Farewell."

This letter greatly encouraged me and I felt so elated that I really enjoyed life for the next few days, which were filled up with a reception of my own each morning, a round of receptions to salute magnates, my salutation to the Emperor, a lunch always with some friends, a long nap at home, a lingering afternoon at the Baths of Titus, and a jolly dinner at some friend's house, for I was invited out twice each day.

On the seventh day before the Kalends of September, as I was on my way to the Palace levee, a runner inconspicuously clad ranged himself alongside my litter and handed me a letter.

It read:

"She whose handwriting he will recognize gives greeting to Hedulio. Take care! Do not let anyone see this letter; take care to seem negligent and uninterested as you read it.

"A conspiracy against the life of Cæsar has been detected and reported. Its leader is said to be Egnatius Capito. As some informer, sponsored by Talponius Pulto, claims to have seen you in Capito's company, you are implicated. Save yourself. Do not return home. Do not go to the Palace, order yourself carried immediately to the Querquetulan Gate. On the way there purchase a raincloak and an umbrella hat and whatever else may be needful for your journey. Outside the *Porta Querquetulana,* in front of Plosurnia's tavern, you will find one of the fastest horses in Italy, a blood-bay, noticeable for light-blue reins with silver bosses, his saddle-cloth light-blue with a silver edge. Descend from your litter in front of the tavern, accost the man holding the horse, say to him:

"'Is this the leopard-tamer's horse?'

"He will reply:

"'It is.'

"Then say:

"'I am the leopard-tamer.'

"He will then allow one of your spare bearers to take the horse.

"Divest yourself of your toga then, not sooner. Equip yourself for your journey. Mount and order your bearers to take your empty litter home. Follow the Prænestine Highroad till it meets the *Via Labicana*. Then take the first crossroad to the Highroad to Tibur. From Tibur press on to Carseoli. From there return to Villa Andivia as you judge best. Provide for yourself thereafter as best you may.

"Farewell."

I recognized Vedia's handwriting. I trusted her implicitly. I was far more elated at her concern for me than I was depressed at my impending ruin. Somehow the fact that she had taken the trouble not only to warn me, but to think out for me all the details of a plan of at least temporary escape, the inference that she hoped, hoped against hope, that I might be somehow saved, heartened me amazingly; so that I was rather inspirited at the prospect of adventure than daunted by the shadow of inescapable doom. I gathered myself together, determined to take as much advantage as possible of Vedia's warning, and of the respite it afforded me. I resolved to follow her suggestions. I had set out for the Palace unusually early. I had plenty of time. I ordered my bearers to carry me through the heart of the City down the whole length of the *Vicus Tuscus* to the meat market.

I should, I suppose, have been in an agony of vain regrets; I rather expected from moment to moment to be drowned in an inundation of such sensations, I was more than a little surprised at my actual feelings. Here I was, hitherto a wealthy Roman nobleman in excellent standing with my fellows, my superiors and the Prince; from now on a hunted fugitive and not likely to postpone my last hour more than a few days. I was, presumably, viewing the throbbing heart of glorious Rome for the last time. I should have felt chief mourner at my own funeral. Actually I relished, I hugely enjoyed, every pace of my progress through the filling streets,

where the passers-by and idlers were still fresh and lively after a night's sleep and where everything was irradiated by cheerful morning sunlight. I felt cheerful as the sunlight.

Beyond the Meat Market I had my bearers stop at the Temple of Fortune, which I entered, there I prayed fervently before the statue of the Goddess.

When I was again out in the market I bought two live white hens, young and plump, and assigned one of my relief-bearers to carry carefully the basket in which the old market-woman ensconced them, after I had paid her well for her basket as well as her hens.

Then I had my men carry me down the straight empty street along the southwest flank of the Circus Maximus. Half way along it I halted them before the Temple of Mercury. This I entered and, bidding one of the attendants lead me to the priest in charge at that hour, I requested him to offer for me the two white hens and beseech for me the favor of the God.

Outside I reëntered my litter and made my bearers trot all the way round by the big and little Cœlian Hills to the Querquetulan Gate. We passed on this route many cheap shops. From one I bought a pair of horseman's high boots, soft and supple and mud-proof. All the way I enjoyed hugely my outing and the sights and sounds around me. From another shop one of my reliefs brought me an umbrella hat which fitted me and a voluminous horseman's raincloak which could not but protect anybody; at another I had bought for me a wallet; at another flint and steel in a good horn case, compact and neat.

Outside the Querquetulan Gate, which my bearers reached blown and sweating, although the reliefs had changed at short intervals, we had no difficulty in locating Plosurnia's tavern. The holder of the bay horse with the blue and silver trappings recognized my pass-words and surrendered his charge to one of my extra bearers. At the tavern another lined my wallet with bread, sausages, olives, dried figs and cheese, while I was changing into horseman's kit.

I put into the wallet my money, more than enough cash

for my journey home, and Vedia's letter. I then mounted, gave my boys their orders and set off at an easy canter. I knew I must show no signs of haste until I was on the Highroad, so I took my time about working round to it. Once on the *Via Tiburtina,* where horsemen at a tearing gallop, going in either direction, were too common a sight to cause any remarks, I let out my mettlesome mount and covered the remainder of the twenty-four miles to Tibur not long before noon.

Between the bridge over the Anio and Tibur are a number of hilltops, from each of which one has a fine view of Rome, if the weather is clear and bright. The weather was very bright and clear and the views very fine. At each hilltop I checked my mount, wheeled him and remained so for sometime, contemplating the magnificence I might never see again, the glory upon which my gaze, most likely, would never again feast. I should have felt my eyes fill with tears at each of these prospects, the viewing of which was, each time, in the nature of a last farewell. Yet, somehow, most irrationally, I felt anything but dejected, rather hopeful and full of conjectures about my future, instead of being filled with forebodings of doom, with sorrow for my hard fate.

BOOK II

DISAPPEARANCE

CHAPTER X

ESCAPE

AT Tibur I put up at a clean little inn I had known of since boyhood, but which I had never before entered or even seen, so that I felt safe there and reasonably sure to pass as a traveller of no rank whatever. My knowledge of country ways, too, enabled me to behave like a landed proprietor of small means.

After a hearty lunch I pushed boldly on up the Valerian Highway and covered the twenty-two miles between Tibur and Carseoli without visibly tiring my mount. He was no more winded nor lathered than any traveller's horse should be at the end of a day on the road. At Carseoli I again knew of a clean, quiet inn, and there I dined and slept.

Thence I intended to follow the rough country roads along the Tolenus. Stream-side roads are always bad, so I allowed two days more in which to reach home, and I could hardly have done it quicker. The night after I left Carseoli I camped by a tributary of the Tolenus in a very pretty little grove. From Carseoli on the weather was fine.

About the third hour of the day, on the fifth day before the Kalends of September, of a fair, bright morning, I came to my own estate. On the road nearing it I had met no one. I met no one along the woodland tracks leading into my property from that side: on my estate I met no one save just as I was about to enter my villa. Then I encountered Ofatulenus, bailiff of the Villa Farm. He, of course, was amazed to see me. I bade him mention to no one, not even to his wife, that I had returned home.

"Be secret!" I enjoined.

He nodded.

I believed he would be dumb. Give me a Sabine to keep a secret; I'd back any Sabine against any other sort of human being.

Ofatulenus took my horse and swore that no one outside of the stable should know it was there or suspect it. I told him to lock the trappings in the third locker in my harness-room, which locker I knew should be empty.

I got from the stable to my villa without encountering any human being. Outside I found Agathemer, as I had hoped I would, sunning himself on the terrace.

He was even more amazed than Ofatulenus and began to exclaim. I silenced him and questioned him as to his health. He told me that his back was entirely healed and that, while any effort still caused him not a little pain, he was capable of the customary activities of his normal life.

I then told him why I had returned home. He listened in silence, except that he here and there put in a query when I omitted some detail in my excitement.

When he understood my situation thoroughly he asked:

"And what do you propose to do?"

"I propose," I said, "to live here unobtrusively, visiting no one, receiving no one and, by all the means in our power, arranging that as few persons as possible may know of my presence here. There is not the faintest scintilla of hope in my doing anything whatever. But if I merely exist without calling attention to my existence there may be some hope for me. No man accused as I am is ever allowed an opportunity to clear himself: but it has often happened that, by keeping away from Rome for a time, a man in my situation has given his friends a chance to use their influence in his behalf, to gain the ear of someone powerful at Court, to get an unbiassed hearing for what they had to say, to prove his complete innocence and rehabilitate him. Vedia and Tanno will do all they can for me. I have hosts of friends, not a few of whom will aid Vedia and Tanno as far as they are able. By keeping quiet here I shall give my friends a chance to save me, if I can be saved. If not, I

shall here await such orders as may be sent me, or my arrest, if I am to be seized."

"Is that your whole plan?" Agathemer queried.

"All," I said.

"May I speak?" he asked. "May I speak out my full mind?"

"Certainly!" I agreed. "Speak!"

"If you stay here as you propose," he said, "you will be arrested not later than tomorrow and haled to your death, if not butchered at sight. At most the centurion in charge might allow you an hour in which to commit suicide. But if you remain here inactive your death is certain, you will never see two sunrises.

"But I agree with you that your friends will do what they can and I heartily believe that Opsitius and Vedia will move sky, earth and sea and Hades beneath all, as far as their powers go, to save you. If they have any chance of succeeding they will need more time than Perennis will give them. If you stay here you will be dead before they can so much as lay plans to gain them the ear of Saoteros and Anteros or some other Palace favorite, let alone groping through all the complicated intrigues necessary to arrange for an audience with the Emperor when he might be in a compliant humor.

"Your plan means certain death for you. I think I can save you if you will put yourself in my hands. Will you?"

"I most certainly will," I said, "and without reservation. If you think you can save me, tell me what you want me to do and I shall do it. I shall follow your suggestions implicitly."

"Well," said Agathemer, "since remaining here means certain death and since there seems a chance of final salvation for you through the efforts of your friends and especially those of Opsitius and Vedia, since they will need plenty of time to save you, if you can be saved, from every point of view the right course of action is not merely inaction, not merely hiding, but an immediate and complete disappear-

ance. If you are found you will be ordered to kill yourself or will be put to death. If you cannot be found you cannot be killed or made to kill yourself. Since you cannot be found you will stay alive until you can be rehabilitated with the Emperor. If that cannot be done or is not done, at least you will be alive. My deduction is, disappear at once and completely. You have many times, for a lark, disguised yourself as an ordinary country proprietor or small farmer and mingled with the crowd at a fair without being recognized. What you have done for an evening in jest now attempt in earnest and for as long a period as is necessary. And to begin with, vanish from here at once and completely."

"But how?" I queried.

"If you are to disappear," said Agathemer, "why should I waste time in explaining how. Let us disappear together, leaving no trace and let us do it at once."

"But," I cried, "I could never consent to anything like that! You are not in any danger. You will be manumitted by my will and you can live safely, comfortably and at ease. Why should I drag you into I know not what miseries, hardships and privations along with me? Tell me what to do and I will proceed to do it. But do you stay here."

"If I told you my plan," said Agathemer, "you could not carry it out alone. My scheme for your escape and vanishment pivots on my disappearing along with you. If you agree, as I beg that you will, we shall both be safe, I hope and trust; alive, able to return here if it can be arranged, able to live elsewhere, somehow, if it cannot be arranged. If you refuse your assent, I shall die with you or soon after you; I am resolute not to survive you."

"I agree," I said. "I am under your orders henceforth, not you under mine."

Agathemer at once guided me into the house and upstairs to his rooms, for he inhabited the guest-suite next my rooms, which had been my uncle's.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is for both of us to eat heartily, for we do not know when we shall eat again. I

have been choicy and whimmy about my eating since I came back here and mostly my meals have revolted me and I have left the *triclinium* practically unfed, whereas I have often been seized with imperative hunger between meals. I have an overabundant supply of all sorts of tempting cold viands up here."

And, in fact, in the room he used as a reading and writing room, on a side table, I found an inviting array of cold meats, jellies, cakes, and fancy breads, with an assortment of wines. We ate till we could eat no more, masticating our food carefully and taking wine in moderation.

Then Agathemer put up a liberal supply of bread and relishes in a small linen bag, obliterated all traces of our meal and presence and went into his dressing-room, where he stripped stark naked and rubbed himself down with a rough towel, carefully disposing of his garments in his wardrobes.

From one of his tables he took a small silver case containing flint, steel and tinder. Then we went into my rooms, where he stripped me, rubbed me down, and disposed of my garments as he had of his. My wallet he took pains to hide in the bottom of a chest, after emptying it and putting the contents about so that each article was hidden in a different place and none could be connected with the others or with the wallet. The little horn case with flint and steel he retained.

The ante-room to what had been my uncle's bed-room and was now mine, had on its walls trophies of hunting-spears and other weapons of the chase. Agathemer selected two knives for killing wounded stags, dependable implements, blade and shank one piece of fine steel, the handles of stag-horn, fastened on with copper rivets.

With the bag of food, the two knives and the two tinder boxes we went up my uncle's private stair to his library and reading room.

My uncle had had his own ideas as to nearly everything, usually much at variance with other people's ideas. As to

building his ideas, perhaps, were less aberrant than his opinions on other subjects, but, certainly he was as tenacious of them as of his other notions.

He held, in the first place, that sleeping-rooms on the ground-floor of any house were unhealthy and a relic of primitive barbarism. He was equally positive that, in the country, where there was ample room for a building to spread out, it was folly to construct a dwelling of three or more stories: such villas he railed at as exhibitions of silly extravagance and of a desire to appear different from one's neighbors. His villa, therefore, was of two stories only.

But, on the other hand, he loved fresh air, light, and wide prospects from his windows; also he spent most of his daylight reading or writing, or both. To gratify to the full all his chief tastes at once he included in the plans of his villa a sort of tower, at the northwest corner, rising well above the remainder of the structure, so that the floors of its third story were on a level higher than that of the ridge-poles of the roofs of the other parts of the villa and from the wide windows of its rooms there was an unobstructed view over the tiles of the villa upon the farm-buildings and beyond them across the fields to the woodlands and the forested eastern and southern horizon as well as a fine outlook down the valley northward and across it westward.

In this third story of this tower he housed his library and there he spent most of his time. It was reached by three stairs. One was connected with the villa in general and was used by him when going down to meals in his *triclinium*, or when escorting visitors up to his library, as he sometimes did with his particular favorites; and this stair was also used by such servants as he might summon to him while in his library or as might have to go up there to attend to it in his absence. The second stair connected with his living-rooms on the second floor, which rooms looked northwestward, as he detested being waked early by the rays of the rising sun and loved basking in the mellow radiance of afternoon sunlight. The third stair is not easy to describe and was one of my uncle's oddest eccentricities. It was inside

a sort of minor tower built against the tower in which his library was set aloft, which minor tower extended far up towards the sky, like a great chimney. What was the primary purpose of this minor tower I shall explain later. In it, however, was a narrow, cramped, spiral stair, unlit by any window or loop-hole, unconnected with the second or first floor of the villa, opening at the top into the library and at the bottom into a cellar, a cellar so far down the hillside that its vault was below the level of the floors of the cellars under the villa in general. This stair my uncle had had constructed to enable him to apply his idea that a master could ensure the diligence of his tenants and slaves only if he was known to be in the habit of coming upon them unexpectedly at any hour of the day, only if they never knew when he might appear and so were spurred to continual diligence for fear he might catch them idling. For my uncle, though he habitually spent his entire daylight in his library, might at any hour slip down this stair, slip out onto the northwestern slope from the villa through a door locked to all but him and of which he kept the key, or might slip out southeastward or southwestward or northeastward, through similar doors on the ground floor, reached by passages built between the many cellars of the upper level of cellars under the ground floor of the villa. By this plan and by popping out sometimes many times a day, sometimes after an interval of many days, he kept his underlings alert.

My uncle's tastes in respect to books were as peculiar as in all other respects. He had a really magnificent library, including all the Greek poets, all our own, and other noble works of literature, such as the historians in both the Greek and Latin tongues; the orators, and the writers on painting, sculpture, architecture and music.

But he paid more attention to his personal fads. He had a creditable collection of all works on divination, a similarly inclusive assemblage of works on the theory of government, and an almost complete array of the writings of the Emperors, from the Divine Julius to the Divine Aurelius, whose meditations he extolled.

But he extolled above all other Princes and authors the Divine Julius.

"Caius Julius Cæsar," he was never tired of saying, "was, in all respects, the greatest man who ever lived on earth. He was also the greatest author earth has ever produced. His poems, his mimes, his comedies, his dramas, compare favorably with the best of their kind. His accounts of his wars, whether against the Gauls or against his domestic adversaries, are models of narration, of lucidity, of terseness and of style. His astronomy is the best manual of that subject in Latin. His works on Engineering surpass anything of their kind in clearness and preserve for the benefit of future generations more useful and original ideas than ever before came from the brain of any one man. His works on divination, particularly that on Auspices, excel everything previously written on that most important of all human arts.

"But his two books against Cato are his masterpiece. It is wonderful that any man could have, in the space of eight days, written, with his own hand, so fiery an invective, so compelling of the attention of any reader, so completely annihilative of his antagonist's pretensions and contentions, so convincingly establishing his own: to have made of it, in the course of composition so rapid and totally unrevised, such a jewel of Latinity, in a style not only pure and impeccable, but glowing and charming, is astonishing. But it is downright miraculous that he should have embodied in it the whole theory of government with all its principles marshalled in their array with the most perfect subordination of considerations of lesser importance to main principles. The two Anticatones contain all that a ruler or any minister of a ruler need know to guide him aright in his tasks. The First Book displays a complete theory of internal policy, the Second of external policy. The two together form a whole which is the most brilliant product of Rome's literary and political genius."

In accordance with his high esteem for Cæsar's masterpiece he had possessed himself of a beautiful copy of it, written by the celebrated calligrapher Praxitelides, upon

papyrus of the finest quality. It was in seven rolls, each book of Cæsar's text occupying two rolls, the index a fifth, and the commentaries of grammarians two more. The rollers inside the rolls were of Nubian ivory, their ends carved into pine cones, each of the fourteen representing the cone of a different variety of pine. Each roll was enclosed in a copper cylinder made accurately to be both watertight and airtight. The seven cylinders were housed in an ebony case, inlaid with mother of pearl. I have never seen any literary work more beautifully enshrined.

When Agathemer and I were in the library he shut and locked the door at the top of my uncle's private stair, as he had the door at the bottom of it. The two keys he hid far apart, where neither was at all likely to be found easily or soon. He had laid the knives, tinder-boxes and bag of food on a table. He went to the case containing my uncle's most highly prized treasures. From it he took the ebony box, opened it and took out two of the cylinders. From these he removed the rolls embodying the grammarians' comments. These rolls he put back in the box, shut it, returned it to the case and closed the case.

The two cylinders he had laid on the table by the things which he had brought up stairs. Inside each cylinder he placed a knife, a tinder-box, and a selection of the food. The bag, with what remained of the food, he tied up again. He handed me one cylinder.

"Now," he said, "we are prepared to escape. My idea is to leave no trace of how we leave this villa, to have no one see us leave, to have nothing with us which could identify us after we have left. We are to go down the secret stair, crawl out through the big lower drain pipe, hide in the bushes till dark, take to the woods, hide by day, creep northward by night, and, if we succeed in reaching a district where no one would recognize us, press on northward boldly, passing ourselves off as runaway slaves if anyone encounters us."

"We'd be locked up as runaway slaves," I said, "advertised, sold to the highest bidder if unclaimed and henceforth kept in slavery."

"I'm in slavery now," said Agathemer. "You, if kept in slavery, would at least be alive and in no danger of being recognized."

"Let us go," said I.

We looked at each other and burst out laughing. We made a sufficiently absurd spectacle, each stark naked, each holding a copper cylinder, as we stood in that elegant and luxurious room. According to the fashion of the time, which aped the ways of the young Emperor, we wore our hair moderately long and as both had hair naturally curly, were perfectly in style as to hair. Our beards, also, we wore clipped but not shaved, and long enough to show a tendency to curl, as the Emperor wore his.

Our laugh over I gave a farewell glance about my little-used library. It was then about the fifth hour. Agathemer gazing rather outside at the landscape than inside at the room remained frozen stiff, staring northward down the valley.

"We are barely in time," he said. "Mercury is with us and Fortune."

"Before I left Rome," I said, "I prayed to Fortune and sacrificed to Mercury."

"Time well spent," he said. "Look there!"

Peering where he pointed I saw, where the road was first visible in the distance, fully two miles away, a dozen or more horsemen, manifestly, even at that distance, of military bearing: I caught, against the sunrays, a gleam of crimson and a glint of gold; I conjectured a detail of Prætorian Guards coming to arrest me or to put me out of the way.

Agathemer opened the upper door of the secret stair, which unlike most doors, could be locked on either side, for my uncle always wanted to lock the doors he used, whichever way he passed through them. After we had passed this door Agathemer closed it behind us, and, as we stood in the pitch dark, locked it.

We groped our way down the dizzying turns of the steep stair, Agathemer going first and, at the bottom, whacking his knee-cap on the lower door. This he unlocked and I

found myself in a dim-lit cellar which I had visited but twice before. Agathemer locked the stair-door behind us.

Now the minor tower, in which was the spiral stair, was built as a vent to carry up into the air, far above the roofs of the villa, any miasma, effluvium or exhalation from the drainage-water of the villa's baths, kitchen and latrines. On the subject of harmful vapours from drains my uncle was fanatical and to bear out his contentions he quoted from the works of many celebrated philosophers and physicians, including those of Galen.

Pursuant with his notions as to how to get rid of the exhalations from drainage and to make certain that no whiff of any such vapours ever found its way up any offset into his kitchen or any latrine or bathroom, he had built in this small high tower a shaft reaching its top and full six feet square all the way up. At its bottom it widened out into a chamber fully twelve feet square, carried down below the level of the cellar floor to form a cemented tank, vat, cistern or cesspool fully as deep as it was wide. The outfall from this trap was by a terra-cotta pipe of considerable size, its opening at such a point that the drain-water in the trap never reached higher than a foot or so below the level of the cellar floor. The various drainage-pipes from different parts of the villa were so led into this trap-room that their lower ends were always under water, so that no exhalations could ever pass up any of them.

To the bottom of the trap settled the solid matter and sediment from the drainage-water. The trap was cleaned by slaves so often that the ooze in it never rose high enough to escape down the outfall pipe and befoul the Bran Brook. For cleaning out the trap-room had an outer door, of heavy, solid oak, carefully locked, which when opened enabled the slaves entrusted with this task to dredge or bale or scoop out the filth and convey it off to be used as garden manure. There was also an inner door, as heavy and solid as the other, opening from the cellar, which enabled my uncle to inspect the trap at his convenience. This door Agathemer opened.

I peered in and, after my eyes became accustomed to the

gloom, descried the opening of the outfall drain opposite me. It was large enough for lean men like me and Agathemer to crawl through, but certainly barely large enough. I could see, after some moments, the lower ends of the drain pipes, two dozen or more, dipping into the foul liquid which filled the cistern. It was very foul, for since my uncle's death the cleaning out of the trap had been neglected and the ooze came almost to the top of the water.

Agathemer hunted about the cellar, found some bits of stone about the size of apples, put them in the bag of food, tied up its neck again, and threw it into the trap, where it sank out of sight. After it he threw in the two keys.

Now was the moment for our plunge into the unknown. Agathemer's plan implied that we must crawl a full furlong through the outfall drain. We might be drowned, at any point of the crawl, by a rush of water from the bath-tank. We might suffocate in the foul vapours of the drain. But, plainly, Agathemer had pitched upon our only chance of escape, and we must escape that way and at once or not at all.

Agathemer threw the two copper cylinders, one after the other, neatly and deftly into the mouth of the outfall drain.

"Now," he said, "one of us must jump for that opening, and must cling to it, his arms inside, his body in the ooze of the trap. The other must stand on the narrow stone ledge inside this door, must contrive to slam the door behind him so that it will shut fast and stay shut, must then, in the pitch dark, jump for the shoulders of the other. If the drag of his weight pulls the other down, both of us will drown in this deep trap in the vile ooze. If the under man clings on, the upper must crawl over him into the drain, pass back to him one of the cylinders and then we shall be ready for our crawl down. Which goes first?"

"You choose," said I.

"Can you slam the door?" Agathemer queried.

I considered the door, the sill, the ledge inside, the jambs of the door, its edges; stood on the ledge, went through the motions and concluded that I could slam the door shut and

not be knocked off into the ooze by its impact or topple off because of the sill's narrowness. I said so.

"Then I'll go first," said Agathemer. "You are, even yet, far more impaired in strength by your beating than I by my flogging. If I came second you might not be able to hold on to the opening of the drain. I know I can hold on, no matter how much filth is plastered over my head as you crawl over me. I should not like the idea of defiling your head with filth in crawling over you. Jump so that your clutching hands just reach my shoulders; so that your weight will come on me gradually as you sink into the ooze. Take your time about crawling over me. Be sure to pass back to me one cylinder."

Then he drilled me as to the signals he would give me by pinching my feet. When he was sure we both knew them he grinned a wry grin, and made a whimsical boyish gesture with his uplifted right hand, took a careful stand on the sill, balanced himself and jumped.

"I'm all right," he called back, "and ready for you."

Three times I tried to slam that door and failed to shut it. The fourth time I found myself, my back against the shut door, my toes sticking out over the edge of the stone sill, balanced in the pitch dark on a too narrow ledge.

"Lean back against the door," Agathemer called, thickly. "If it gives it is not shut."

It did not give.

I said so.

"Then no one will ever know how we got out," said Agathemer; adding: "Jump when you are ready, but say 'now.'"

I jumped and my fingers caught his shoulders. He held on. My body sank slowly through the ooze, which gave way with a sickening sliminess, until I was in contact with Agathemer all the way to my toes. Then I began to try to crawl up over him. I found it far harder than either of us had anticipated.

All slippery as we were with the foul ooze it was a fearful struggle for me to scramble up over him, I slipped back so

often. After what seemed an hour of effort and apprehension I had my head, shoulders and most of my body in the drain and knew I had succeeded. I wriggled forward till I felt my feet beyond the opening, then about as far ahead, pushing before me the cylinders. When Agathemer touched my foot I pushed a cylinder past my body and felt, with my ankle, that he pulled it back.

After that, escape was a matter of wriggling on down the drain. And wriggling was not impossible, though excessively difficult and exhausting. The drain was nowhere choked with silt, but all along was furred with ooze and there was more than an inch of ooze along its bottom. In this, hitching myself forward on my elbows by violent contortions, I slipped back almost as much as I heaved forward.

Agathemer seemed to have as much trouble as I had and to find the effort as exhausting. For he had instructed me that I was not to crawl forward until he pinched my foot. One pinch was to mean "advance," two pinches "rest." More than once he had signalled me to rest.

Our worst moment came somewhere near half way down the sewer. There I encountered a cracked drain-pipe, the ragged edge of the broken terra-cotta projecting into the sewer, its point toward me. I wriggled my shoulders by it, though it gouged my shoulder-muscle on that side; but, at my hips, it stuck into me so that I could not get past it.

Agathemer, behind, kept pinching my foot, signalling for me to go forward. I bellowed explanations, but could not suppose that he could hear them in that horrible tube. But he either heard or guessed, he never could be sure which. Anyhow, he felt that we must get forward or perish. In desperation he sunk his teeth into the soft part of the inner side of the sole of my left foot. The pain made me give a convulsive wriggle and I scraped past the obstacle, tearing my hip badly in getting clear.

From there on we wriggled frantically till I could see ahead a round patch of light at the lower outfall of the drain.

It seemed an age before I reached the opening, but reach

t I did. I lay there, my head just inside, panting and guzzling clean air in great gulping gasps. Agathemer pinched my foot. I slipped out into the oozy pool below the outfall, slid out as quietly as I could and kept myself submerged up to my chin, clutching my cylinder with one hand, pulling myself clear of the drain and keeping my head out of the drainage by holding to the stem of an alder bush growing by the brook's edge.

I came to rest, the sunlight dazzling my eyes, though the outfall was shaded by willows above the alders, and looked for Agathemer. He, his face purple, kept his head inside the sewer and I could see him suck in the clean air in long gasps as I had.

At that instant there was a squawking above us and, through the alders, came, quacking and flapping their wings, a hundred or more of my uncle's valued white ducks. Their alarm made me peep through the alder stems. I saw, not ten yards from my face, the legs of horses, heard their hoofs thud on the roadway, descried men's feet against their bellies, recognized the gilded edges of the boot-soles, the make of the boots, the gilt scales on the kilt-straps, the gilded breast plates, the crimson tunics and short-cloaks, the gilded sword-sheaths and helmets. There, just above us, was passing the detachment of Prætorian Guards sent to arrest or despatch me.

They clanked by us, never suspecting our proximity, though the ducks resented our presence in their favorite pool and quacked at us protestingly. They continued, in fact, to quack at us most of the time until sunset, so that both of us were in an agony of dread for fear that some passer-by might notice their voluble expressions of displeasure and might take a notion to investigate to discover what was exciting their wrath.

But no one was attracted by the ducks' noise and, if anyone passed up or down the road we, where we were, did not know it.

We talked, at intervals, in whispers. Agathemer said that he had been barely grazed by the broken drain-pipe and

hardly noticed his scratches. I, on the other hand, was in great pain from the gouge along my hip, and hardly less pained by the tear in my shoulder. The water, under which I had to keep up to my chin, dulled the pain of my wounds, but chilled me till my teeth chattered, though the weather was hot; so hot in fact, that the sunrays on my head seemed to scorch my hair, even through the willows and alders. I was devoutly glad when the sunrays became more slanting and the daylight began to wane, and the ducks, still quacking protestingly, departed.

CHAPTER XI

HIDING

IT was fully dark before we dared to leave our hiding-place and attempt the risky venture of essaying to reach a safer shelter or refuge in the forests without attracting the attention of any dog at any of the several farmsteads which we must pass.

Agathemer led and I followed, my teeth chattering and the night insects biting me severely. Hugging our precious copper cylinders we waded more than waistdeep in the water, up the Bran Brook, sometimes all but swimming, as we skirted some of the deeper pools. There was no moon and we could see but little by the faint starlight. We had to go slowly, as we could not swim and keep hold of our cylinders; and must not risk losing one if Agathemer went over his head in a deep pool. It seemed to me that we had been threading the curves of the brook for at least two hours when I began to feel as if something were wrong. Even in the dark I had been aware of a sort of recognition of each pool, shallow, riffle, bend, bank or what not. Now, gradually, it came over me that I was among surroundings as unfamiliar as if I had not been in Sabinum, or even in Italy.

I caught Agathemer by the arm.

"Where are we?" I whispered.

"Don't talk!" he warned.

But I insisted; for, as we were by now no more than knee-deep in the water, I knew we must be well up towards the headwaters and it came over me that we had not turned off anywhere as sharply as we should had we turned up either the Chaff or the Flour.

"Are we going up the Bran?" I queried.

"Precisely!" Agathemer breathed.

I almost spoke out loud.

"This," I said, "is the last place on earth I'd expect you to guide me to."

"Precisely," he repeated, "and it's the last place on earth anybody else would expect me to lead you to or you to be in, by any chance; therefore it's the last place in Italy where any one will look for you; therefore it is, just now, the safest place in Italy for you. Come on, I know every stone of this brook."

I followed him. His logic was good, but, on Ducconius Furfur's land I felt hopelessly lost and overwhelmed by despair.

We had not gone far from where I had forced Agathemer to reveal his ruse, when he turned round and whispered:

"This is the place. Here we leave the water. Follow me."

I was dimly aware of a blacker blackness before us, as of a big, tall rock. This we skirted and then stepped out of the brook towards the left. There we stepped into deep drifts of dead leaves.

"Here is bedding," said Agathemer, "such as Ulysses was content with after his long sea-swim to the island of the Phæacians. Perhaps we can get along in such bedding."

Naked as we were we burrowed into the dead leaves, and, after a bit I felt less chilly, though by no means warm.

Agathemer took from me the cylinder I had been carrying; opened one of the two, a matter of some difficulty, as the top was so tight; sniffed at it, and took from it some morsels of food: a bit of cold ham, a bit of cold fowl and a

bit of bread. These I ate, chewing them slowly. At the same time he ate, as slowly, an equal share.

After eating we tried to sleep. I was too weary and drowsy to keep awake, and too cold and too much in pain from the scratch on my shoulder and the gouge on my hip to be able to sleep long. I got some sleep before dawn, but not much.

Fortunately for us the night had been clear, warm and windless. Even so we suffered severely with the cold; since the chilled air, of course, rolled down the hillsides into the hollow along the bed of the brook, till the valley was filled with thick mist and every leaf and twig dripped with moisture. Through the mist the dawn broke pearly gray at first and then iridescent; and, when the first sunrays penetrated the white haze and gilded every leaf-edge, turning the tree-tops to gold and making every waterdrop a diamond, no lovelier morning could be imagined.

The trees about and above us were mostly beeches, with many chestnuts and a few plane-trees and poplars. We were in a clump of willows with thick alders under them, so that, even with no other protection, we could not have been seen from any distance. And we were most excellently protected, being on a little island where the brook forked and flowed, three or four yards wide and nearly a yard deep, round a huge gray rock, fully fifteen yards across and nearly seven yards high, a bulge of worn stone, shaped much like half a melon and almost as symmetrical. And, as one might lay half a melon, curve up, and then split it with one blow of a kitchen-knife, so this great rock, as if cleft by a single sweep of a Titan's sword, was rent in half and the halves left about four yards apart. The fracture was clean and smooth, except that a piece about two yards square had cracked loose at the ground level from the southern half and lay bedded in the mud, its top a foot or so above the earth, leaving in the face of one rock a rectangular niche about a man's length each way, in which cavity two men could shelter from the rain.

As soon as it was light enough to see I was for crawling into this little cavern. But Agathemer restrained me.

"The face of the rock," he said, "would feel cold as ice to your skin. You have, even if you do not realize it, somewhat warmed the leaves next you. For the present we are least uncomfortable where we are. The dawn-wind cannot get at our hides while we are under these leaves. Keep still."

He kept himself as much as possible under the leaves but wriggled nearer the altar-shaped bit of rock. Half-sitting, half crouching by it, little besides his head out of the heap of leaves in which he was, he opened both cylinders and laid out on the top of the stone what food was in them. This he divided into six equal portions, two he put back in each cylinder. We munched interminably, making every morsel last as long as possible.

The food revived me, and even before the dawn-wind had died, the rays of the sun began to make themselves felt. I began to be restless; Agathemer again checked me.

"Keep still," he commanded. "As soon as the sun has dried the dew off the leaves I can make you more comfortable. Just now we are best as we are."

I kept under the leaves, but I peered about. At each end of the cleft between the two halves of the rock I could see the brook brawling by among the worn stones. The line of the cleft was directly across the bed of the brook; and, along the cleft, past the detached, almost buried, altar-shaped stone, I descried, barely discernible but unmistakable, such a path as is made by the bare or sandalled feet of even one human being following daily the same track. I conned it. I judged that it was many, many decades old and had been trodden daily for a lifetime or so, but that it had been totally disused for at least a year and possibly for more.

I pointed it out to Agathemer and asked him about it.

"That," he said, "is part of what used to be the shorter and more used of the two paths from Furfur's villa to Philargyrus's farmstead. Naturally, since the Philargyrus farm has been detached from Furfur's estate and has become part of yours, there must be very little intercommunication between the farm and the villa and I judged that any slave going from one to the other would avoid the more obvious

path and sneak round the longer way. Therefore I judged it safer to locate here, as this path is probably totally unused."

"How did you know of it?" I queried.

Up to his neck in leaves, arms under too, only his head out, Agathemer blushed all over his handsome face.

"Before Andivius won the suit," he said, "while Philargyrus was still Furfur's tenant, I had an impassioned love-affair with one of Furfur's slave-girls. We used to meet here, at first on moonlit nights, and, later, when we each knew every inch of our way here and home again, more often on moonless nights. I always waded up and down the bed of the brook, so as to leave no scent for any dog to follow. I know this nook well and thought of it the instant I began to plan an escape for you."

I said nothing.

"It is barely possible," he said, "that some one may use this path, even if no one has passed along it for months. That is just the way luck turns out. I mean to be invisible if anyone does come. There was no likelihood of anyone coming by at dawn, and no possibility of doing anything if anyone did come. Now it is warm enough for me to pick off the outer layer of dew-wet leaves from whatever heaps of dead leaves are hereabouts. I can gather the dry leaves into that little grotto. We can lie on a bed of them, wrapped up in them we can cower under them, we can even pull our heads under and be invisible if we hear footsteps approaching. You keep still."

He then stood up and went off. After a time he returned with a great armful of leaves, which he threw into the niche. After many trips he had the niche almost full of fairly dry dead leaves. By this time the warmth of the sun was making itself felt and I stood up and stretched myself. I did not feel weak, but my shoulder and hip, where the drain-pipe had torn me, and the sole of my foot, where Agathemer had bitten me, were decidedly painful. Agathemer, solicitously, steadied me on my feet and led me to the streamside. There I seated myself on a convenient

rock and he bathed my foot, hip and shoulder. There was no sign of puffiness or heat in any of the three wounds, but all three were raw and sore. We had nothing with which to dress them and Agathemer merely dried them as well as he could by patting them.

Meanwhile, even in my misery and despair, even hungry, weak and cold and in pain as I was, I could not but feel a gleam of pleasure at the enchanting beauty of the woodland scene about our hiding place. I gazed up at the bits of blue sky between the sunlit boughs, at the canopy of green, at the tenderer green of the underwood, at the carpet of grass, ferns, sedges and flowering plants which hid the earth and I almost rejoiced at its loveliness.

Agathemer led me back to our retreat and ensconced me in the nook of rock, on a soft deep bed of dry dead leaves, under a coverlet of more. Into the heaps he burrowed. The warmth of his naked body warmed me a trifle. There we lay still till dark. I slept, I think, from about noon till after sunset.

While we could still see, Agathemer, making me keep flat as I was, wriggled out of the leaves and pushed them aside from my head and face. We then ate half our remaining food. As it grew dark Agathemer expounded to me his plans.

"Last night," he said, "there was no sense in doing anything. Hiding and keeping out of sight was the best thing we could do. But tonight I must try to steal what we need most. The risk must be taken. If I do not return you will know I have done my best. But I feel confident of returning before midnight. I know every farmstead on Furfur's estate and all the dogs know me. On your estate I not only know the dogs, but I have just finished an inspection and I know the location of every dairy, smoke-house, larder and oven, I might almost say of every loaf, cheese, ham, flitch, wine-vat and oil-jar on the estate, not to mention every store-room where I might get us hats, tunics, sandals, quilts and what not.

"If I cannot do it otherwise, as a last resort I'll wake

Uturia and tell her of our situation; she will help and will be secret. But I'll not resort to her if I can help it. Her most willing secrecy will not be as safe as her ignorance of our fate. No torture could surmount that."

I wanted to say "Farewell," but restrained myself and uttered a not too gloomy:

"Good luck and a prosperous return!"

After that, I lay and quaked till long past midnight. Then, I seemed to hear sounds which I could but interpret as heralding Agathemer's approach. In fact he soon spoke to me from close by and I heard the unmistakable blurred noise made by a soft and yet heavy pack deposited on the ground by my bed of leaves.

"I've nearly everything I wanted," said Agathemer. "Keep still while I untie the quilt I carried it all in, and find things in the dark."

Presently he said:

"Stand up, and I'll try to dress you."

In the dark his hand found my hand and he guided me so that I extricated myself from the heap of leaves without hitting my head on the jutting roof of rock and without slipping on the wet earth or stumbling from weakness.

In the dark he slipped over my head a coarse, patched tunic. (I could feel against my skin the rude stitching of the patches.) Then he wrapped about me a coarse cloak also much patched.

"Now," he said, "stand where you are till I make some sort of a bed for you."

He fumbled about in the dark, grunting and making, I thought, too much rustling in the leaves. Presently he said:

"I've laid a doubled quilt on the leaves and packed them down. Give me your hand and I'll arrange you on it. Then I'll cover you with another quilt."

He did, deftly and solicitously.

I began to feel warm for the first time since I had sunk into the ooze of the drain-trap.

Agathemer fumbled about in the dark for a while and then

came near again and felt me, making sure where my head was. He made me sit up.

"Smell that!" he said, "and catch hold of it."

I smelt ewe's-milk cheese and my fingers closed on a generous piece of it. Then he put into my other hand a big chunk of bread, not yet entirely cold.

I bit the bread. It was Ofatulena's unsurpassable farm bread, half wheat flour and half barley flour and at that more appetizing and flavorsome than any wheat-bread I ever tasted.

"There is plenty for both of us," Agathemer said, "eat all you want, but eat slow and be careful not to bolt a morsel."

He sat down by me and we munched in silence.

By and by he asked:

"Do you want any more?"

"No," I answered, "you judged my capacity pretty well. I am filled up."

"Don't lie down," he said, "I have a small kid-skin of wine."

We laughed a good deal before he made sure precisely where my mouth was and put into it the reed which projected from one leg of the kid-skin. I drank in abundance of a thin, sour wine, such as we kept for the slaves. It gave me new life.

After that draught of wine I composed myself to sleep and went to sleep at once. I knew nothing of Agathemer's doings after that and did not feel him when he lay down by me. I slept till broad daylight.

When I waked Agathemer gave me a moderate draught of wine and all the bread and cheese I chose to eat: also a handful of olives. Then he displayed the total of his plunder: hats, with brims neither too broad nor too narrow, the best pattern if one was to have only one hat, worn and battered enough to suit us as being inconspicuous, yet nowhere torn, broken or slit; a tunic and cloak apiece, about the oldest and most patched in my villa-farm storage-loft, such as Ofatulena would hand out to newly bought and untried

slaves; three quilts, as bad as the cloaks and tunics, yet, like them, fairly serviceable and far from worn out; the kid-skin of wine, a whole loaf of bread and the remains of the one we had been eating, what was left of a cheese and another whole; a little, tall, narrow jar of olive oil; a small bag of olives; a tiny box full of salt, the box of beechwood and about the size of a man's three fingers; a whetstone, a pair of rusty scissors; two small beechwood cups; a little copper dipper; some rags, old and worn, but perfectly clean; and a flageolet!

"In the name of Dionysius!" I cried laughing, "why the flageolet?"

Agathemer laughed also.

"My hand," he said, "came on it in the dark while feeling for the scissors. I could not resist bringing it. It is small, it weighs little, it will not add to our burdens and, once far away from here, I can play on it when we are lonely and so cheer us up."

"You appear," I said, "to have been able to help yourself as you pleased."

"No more trouble," said he, "than if I had walked out of the villa night before last and poked about the outbuildings to see whether everything was as when I inspected them by day; only three dogs barked, and they quieted down almost immediately. I am sure I roused no one and am ready to wager that every slave was as sound asleep as if I had not been there."

I lazily readjusted myself on my quilt and leaf mattress, tucking my quilt close about me. The morning was still, warm and cloudy, not a ray of sunshine visible, even for a moment, since sunset the night before.

"Time to dress your wounds!" said Agathemer.

He brought from the brook a cupful of water, and, with the smallest of the rags, solicitously bathed the gouge on my hip. He pronounced it healing healthily. He then anointed it with olive oil. The bathing and anointing comforted me greatly. Then he similarly treated my shoulder and foot. When I was composed and covered he said:

"Now for the scissors!" and he sharpened them on his whetstone until he felt satisfied that he could get them no sharper, then he clipped my hair and beard, as closely as those scissors could. Then I sat up and clipped him, awkwardly and unevenly, but effectively.

Hardly were we shorn when drops of rain began to patter on the leaves above us. Agathemer wrapped his bread in the rags, put it between the two hats and tucked it under the leaves in one inner corner of the little grotto; bestowed the other things on it, or by it or in the other corner; and then lay down by me and pulled his quilt over him, then managing to cover both of us with leaves so that no trace of our presence would be visible to any passer-by, yet we could breathe comfortably behind or under our screen of leaves.

It rained all day, a sluggish drizzle, soaking the earth, but not accumulating enough water on it to produce visible trickles flowing on the surface. The air was perfectly windless, so that no rain blew in on us as we lay; we were damp, but not wet.

Before dusk the rain ceased and a brisk, warm wind shook the drops from the trees. We ate and Agathemer declared his intention of going on another raid about an hour after dark.

"What are you after this time?" I queried.

"More food," he said, "all I dare steal. I must not steal too much from any one place. I'll wager my pilferings of last night will pass, not merely unheeded, but entirely unnoticed. Ofatulena herself is so scatter-brained that she will never be sure that two loaves vanished from her oven; I doubt if she will so much as suspect any loss. But I cannot repeat that depletion of her baking tonight; she might talk. She is not quick-witted enough to conjecture the truth, if she did her utter loyalty would keep her mute; she'd impute the theft to some slave and likely as not have an investigation and advertise her loss. If there happened to be a crafty inspector with the Prætorians and if they have lingered, they might suspect the truth, beat the woods for us and capture us. So I must take a little here and a little there.

"Then I want another quilt for myself, and shoes for both of us. Is there anything else you can think of?"

"Manifestly!" I said, "we need a slave-scourge, a branding-iron with the long F for 'runaway',* a brazier big enough to heat the branding iron and enough charcoal to fire it once."

"What, in the name of Mercury," he whispered amazedly, "do you want of a branding-iron and a scourge?"

"We are to pass as runaway slaves, if caught, according to your outline of a plan," I said, "we had best do all we can to be sure of being thought ordinary runaway slaves. Few slaves travel far from their owners' land when they first venture to run away. We should be branded, to seem old offenders.

"As for you, thanks to Nemestronia, your back is all it should be to help play the part we intend. My back has no scars. You must scourge me till I have as many as you."

In the late dusk, inside that grotto, under the dead leaves, I could see the horror on his face.

"I scourge you!" he cried aloud.

"Hush!" I admonished him. "Scourged I must be, if I am to hope to escape Cæsar's agents as you have cleverly conceived that I might. Steal a scourge and a branding-iron tonight, and let us be ready for the road as soon as may be; we cannot set out northwards till my back is healed and the brands on both of us, too."

We wrangled and argued till it was past time for him to start on his expedition. I finally declared that, unless he fetched a scourge and a branding-iron, I would, at daybreak, walk back to my villa and give myself up to the authorities. At that he consented.

I went to sleep soon after he was gone and never woke till daylight.

I woke from a troubled sleep, haunted by nightmare dreams, woke aware of a general discomfort, misery and horror, and of acute pain in my wounds. I seemed to have a

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* *Fugitivus.* The short F stood for *fur*, "thief."

good appetite and ate with relish; but, hardly had I ceased eating, when I appeared definitely feverish and the pain in my foot became unbearable.

I told Agathemer how I felt and he examined my wounds. All three were puffy, red, even purplish, and with pus at the edges. It was then and has always been since a puzzle to both of us why wounds, seemingly healing naturally when unwashed and undressed, should inflame and fester after careful washing and dressing.

My fever was not high, but enough to make me fretful and irritable. The day was very hot and still. I made Agathemer show me what spoil he had brought and at once ordered him to light the charcoal brazier, heat the iron and brand me. He demurred.

"If you feel feverish," he said, "the pain of the branding will double your fever and, if you have three inflamed wounds, the brand will fester to a certainty. You'll probably die of it, if I brand you."

"As well die one way as another," I said. "If we stay here we are certain to be discovered sooner or later. Our only hope is to get away as soon as may be. That cannot be until my back and both brands heal enough for us to tramp northward. Your back is healed, so your brand will heal promptly. I have to get over these wounds and the branding and scourging too. We must be quick."

He argued, but I was half delirious and wholly unreasonable. I again threatened to go straight to the villa and give myself up unless I had my way.

Agathemer, distraught and aghast, yielded. I argued that in the early haze, the little trifle of smoke from the charcoal could not attract notice. He complied. He had trouble getting a light from his flint and steel, but he succeeded, and, when the charcoal caught, set the little brazier close to our cook and fanned it with a leafy bough to disperse the smoke. When no further trace of smoke appeared and the charcoal glowed evenly, he put the iron to heat.

When it was hot enough he suggested, again, that we put off branding me till next day, and that he brand only him-

self. I insisted on his branding me and branding me first.

To my amazement, when he had bared my shoulder, set me in position, and snatched the iron from the brazier, I shrank back with a sort of weak scream.

Agathemer instantly replaced the iron in the brazier and turned, staring at me in silence.

Instantly I had a revulsion of resolution, of obstinacy, of delirious rage. I reviled him. I commanded, I threatened.

Coolly he bared his left shoulder, knelt by the brazier and made as if to brand himself.

"You can't do it," I protested, "you'll scar yourself to no purpose and anyone will know the mark is not a brand. Fetch the iron here and hand it to me."

He did, deftly. Without a wince or squeak he, kneeling and leaning, held his shoulder to the white-hot iron. I could not have done better if I had been well and standing, instead of delirious and sitting, wrapped in a quilt, in a bed of dried leaves. I set the iron fair on the muscle of his shoulder, held it there just the brief instant required for branding without injury and snatched it away without any drag sideways.

After witnessing the stoical heroism of my slave I could not but insist on his branding me and was exalted to the point of nerve-tension at which I bit in my half-uttered scream as the heat seared my flesh. Agathemer dressed each brand with an oil-soaked rag and we composed ourselves to hide until dark.

CHAPTER XII

SUCCOUR

AS on the days before, no one passed us and, indeed, as far as I could judge, no living thing came near us, except a hare or two. We kept close under our heap of leaves, inside our niche of rock. But this time I did not

uggle inside my cloak and quilt; I cast off, first the quilt, en the cloak, and lay in my tunic only, panting and gasping. or it was a very hot, still day, and my fever increased, creased so much, in fact, that I could stomach but little od at dusk and took but little interest in anything; in my ndition, in Agathemer's brand, in his departure.

His return, late at night, was to me only one incident of sort of continuous nightmare: I was half asleep, wholly lirious and every impression was as the half-delusion of half-waking dream. I was barely half-conscious, yet I had nse enough to lie still, except for writhing and turning er, and to restrain myself from singing or screaming.

At dawn I ate even less than at dusk, but I did eat some- ing. Eating roused me enough for me to insist on Agathe- r's stripping me and scourging me. He felt my forehead, y wrists and my feet, and shook his head.

"You have a terrific fever," he said, "and four festering unds, for the brand-mark is festering already; you are in nger of death anyhow as it is; you will never recover from scourging."

I, with all a delirious man's unreasoning, insisted and ain threatened to give myself up.

The sun was about two hours high, gilding the treetops d sending shafts of golden light through the still wet liage. One such shaft of sunshine shot between the two lves of the great rock that sheltered us and fell on the ble-topped fragment of stone, like a nearly buried altar, nich lay midway of them.

Writhing and groaning I slipped out of my quilt, cloak d tunic, and, groaning, I crawled to the flat-topped stone. ace down on it I lay, my chest against it, my knees on the round, my arms outstretched, my fingers gripping the far lge of the altar-stone.

So placed I bade Agathemer lay on with the scourge.

"Flay me!" I ordered. "I should be torn raw from neck hips. The worse I am scored and ripped the more pro- ction the scars will be. Lay on furiously. If I faint, nish the job before you revive me."

He began lashing me, but hesitatingly; I reviled him fo a coward; but the pain, even of the first strokes, was to much for me. I could feel the sweat on my forehead, m finger nails dug into the sides of the stone, its sharp edg cut into the soft inside of my clutching fingers, I bit m tongue to keep from shrieking, yet my voice, as I taunte Agathemer and railed at him, rose to a sort of scream.

He laid on more fiercely. After a dozen blows or mor a harder blow made me groan. At that instant I was awar of a shadow above me, of a human figure rushing past me and the blows ceased.

I let go my clutch on the rock and tried to stand up. I did succeed in kneeling up, supported by my hand on th altar stone. So half erect I looked round.

Agathemer lay under the intruder, who had him by th throat with both hands. Partly by sight, even from behin him, partly by the objurgation which he panted out, I rec ognized Chryseros Philargyrus and realized that he though that Agathemer had been torturing me in revenge for hi flogging at Nemestronia's.

I instantly forgot my plight and my natural instinct asserted themselves. As if I had been then what I had bee ten days before, I ordered Chryseros to loose Agathemer and he obeyed me, as if I had been what I felt myself, hi master.

He and Agathemer stood up and looked at me and eac other: I must have made a laughable spectacle, swaying as I knelt, my hands on the rock, my hair and beard mere clippe stubble, and I naked, with my back bleeding and both shoul ders and one hip inflamed, purple-red and puffy. Certainly both Chryseros and Agathemer appeared comical to me, eve in my pain and misery and weakness and through the envel oping horror of my fever. Agathemer, his hair and beard worse stubble than mine, was gasping and ruefully rubbing his throat, making a ridiculous figure in his brown tunic patched with patches of red, yellow and blue, all sewed o with white thread. Chryseros was panting, and his bal head shone in the sun. He had cast off his cloak as h

rushed at Agathemer and stood only in his rusty brown tunic, himself as dry and lean as a dead limb of a tree.

Although he had obeyed instantly when I ordered him to loose Agathemer, yet, perhaps from some vagary of my fever, I stared at Chryseros without any other feeling than that he had been for most of his life the tenant of our family enemy. As I looked at him I felt utterly lost, as if there was now no hope for me, as if Chryseros would certainly betray me to the authorities. I felt utterly despairing and totally reckless. This mood, oddly enough, urged me to do the very best thing I could have done.

Either from right instinct or delirious folly, I informed Chryseros fully of our purposes, doings and plans. He apologized to Agathemer for his assault on him, affirmed his complete loyalty to me and promised all possible assistance and perfect secrecy. He examined me and said:

"I'll have your wounds clean, your back dried up, every inch of you healing properly and your fever cooled before morning. Here, Agathemer, help get him abed."

They washed my back and laid me, naked as I was, on the quilt laid over the bed of leaves, then they covered me with the other quilt.

"You two keep close till I come back," Chryseros advised. "Someone else might use this path. I'll be back soon and I'll arrange to excite no suspicion."

When he returned he had me out on the flat-topped stone, washed my back and wounds, and then bathed them with some lotion which, when first applied, felt cooling and soothing, but almost at once burnt into me till every part of my back, my hip and both my shoulders smarted worse than had the one shoulder as the brand seared it: at least that was how I felt. I writhed and groaned.

"Keep still!" Chryseros admonished me. "Keep quiet! This is doing you good."

And he chafed my back, inundating it with his fiery liniment till I was on the verge of fainting from mere pain. Half fainting I was as the two raised me to my feet and put the tunic on me, as they helped me back to my bed in the

little grotto. When I was recumbent Chryseros made me drink a nauseous, black, bitter liquid and then lie flat.

"Keep there till morning," he said, "and fast. Food can do you no good while you have such a fever and fasting can do you no harm."

Actually I was asleep before I knew it and slept all day and all night, not waking until Agathemer, when Chryseros ordered it, roused me. They pressed on me a quart bowl of milk warm from the cow, and I drank most of it. I felt much better and Chryseros pronounced me free from fever and after he had inspected my back and wounds and again inundated them with his fiery lotion, declared all inflammation had vanished and that I was healing up properly. He enjoined Agathemer to let me have no food but milk, said he would bring more after sunset, and told us to keep close in the niche. I slept all day long, and after a second draught of milk at dusk, all night till the sun was well up.

I woke feeling stiff and sore, uncomfortable on my back, hip and shoulders, but with no positive pain anywhere: also I felt like my usual self. And I may say here, parenthetically, that I never had another day's illness through all the vicissitudes of my flight, hiding, adventures and misfortunes.

Chryseros brought me milk; excellent wheat bread; a smooth and appetizing veal-stew, with beans and lentils in it and seasoned with spices; cheese newly made from fresh curds, and luscious plums. He let me eat my fill and drink all the milk I wanted. But he would not let me taste the wine of which Agathemer drank moderately.

"If you feel sleepy," said Chryseros, "roll over, cover yourself and go to sleep; we can talk tomorrow."

"I do not feel sleepy," I declared, "and I feel very much like asking questions."

"Then we'll talk at once," he said, "we'll take all the time needed for your recovery; but once you are recovered, we'll waste no time in getting you out of Sabinum."

The morning was fair and warm, with a light breeze. I was on my bed of leaves inside my nook of rock. Agathemer

was squatted by my head, his back against that edge of the niche; by my feet, leaning against the opposite edge of the niche, facing Agathemer, and therefore where I could best see and hear him sat Chryseros.

He began by telling me that I must remain where I was until he judged me fit to travel, even if I remained ten days more; but that he thought I might be able to start tomorrow night and would make his preparations accordingly. His first idea, he said, had been to set off on horseback for Spolitum, near which he had a sister married to a prosperous farmer, to whom he had paid visits at intervals of about five years. He had thought that it would be easy and safe to take me and Agathemer with him on foot, disguised as slaves. This idea, however, Agathemer had antagonized, pointing out that any convoy from my estate would be severely scrutinized and every man examined and searched; that there was no chance of our escaping by such a plan.

At this point of his discourse he told me that the Prætorians had already departed from Villa Andivia leaving in charge Gratillus, a treasury officer of the confiscation department, a man whom I knew too well as also a member of the secret service, an articled Imperial spy and an active professional informer, moreover a man who had always hated my uncle, and who had hated me from my boyhood.

According to Chryseros, Gratillus had made no great effort to find me, since, in fact, neither he nor anyone connected with the government had had any suspicion that I had returned home. He had merely made a perfunctory investigation to assure himself, as he thought, that I had not so returned. He had examined all the tenantry and slaves, had asked questions, but had tortured no one and had been quite satisfied with the answers he had received. Oddly enough, while he had closely questioned himself and my other eight tenants as to the date of my departure for Rome and as to whether they had seen me since they last saw me in Rome, and while he had questioned Uturia and Ofatulena as to whether they had seen me since I set off for Rome, he had somehow omitted or forgotten to ask Ofatulenus the

same questions, so that he had been able to answer truthfully the only questions asked of him. Agathemer, I found, had told Chryseros that only he and Ofatulenus had seen me between my return and escape.

Gratillus had especially questioned the wives of my eight tenants, and as Chryseros was a widower, his widowed daughter, who lived with him. Each of these he had summoned before him separately and had interrogated alone and at length. This was like Gratillus.

He had made but one arrest, and this dumbfounded me. Ducconius Furfur had been interrogated, like all my neighbors, but, while the rest had been dismissed after answering what questions were put to them, Furfur, with two servants, had accompanied to Rome the Prætorians when they went away.

The more I reflected on this the stranger it seemed.

Neither Chryseros nor Agathemer had any doubt that a close watch was being quietly kept to make sure that I could not now return to Villa Andivia without being caught; nor yet leave it if I did return or had returned.

As a result of his discussion with Agathemer they had agreed that we were to leave by night and on foot, as we had originally intended. But he had argued that, while it was perfectly sensible for us to plan to pass ourselves off as runaway slaves if arrested and questioned, there was no sense whatever in doing anything to appear like runaway slaves unless we were actually arrested and questioned. Agathemer had admitted this, but had pointed out that, while we had no hope of any assistance whatever, and were planning to escape by our own unaided efforts, there was no possibility of our trying to appear anything else than runaway slaves, as he could easily steal slaves' cloaks and tunics from my spare stores, but had no hope of getting his hands on any other garments. He had joyfully accepted the ideas and suggestions which Chryseros put forward, as well as his proffers of assistance.

Chryseros directed that the two copper cylinders and most of the spoils of Agathemer's pilferings should be left in our

little grotto, hidden under the dead leaves. He would then smuggle them away and dispose of them. He would supply us with rusty brown tunics and cloaks of undyed mixed wool, such as were worn by poor or economical farmers throughout Sabinum. Also he would supply us with hats better than those Agathemer had fetched; belts; and travelling wallets, neither too big nor too small, neither too new nor too worn, and each with a shoulder-strap for easy carriage; good, heavy shoes, two pair of them for each of us, so that we might carry a spare pair in each wallet. In the wallets also we were to hide the hunting knives Agathemer had taken from my uncle's collection; which knives, blades, handles and sheaths Chryseros highly approved.

At sight of the flageolet he grinned, the only smile I saw on his face while he was helping us in our hiding and out of it. Agathemer, obstinately, insisted on taking that flageolet. And Chryseros grudgingly admitted that it might prove a really valuable possession, perhaps. We took, of course, our two little flint and steel cases.

Chryseros said we ought to eat all we could manage to swallow up to the moment of our departure. He would pack our wallets with food which could be made to last four or five days and would be plenty for two days. Most important of all he would supply us with money, half copper and half silver, as much as our wallets could properly hold, so as not to make us appear thieves, if we were suspected and haled before a magistrate. With money we could travel openly and by day after we were well out of Sabinum.

We planned to make our way eastward, inclining very little to the north, towards Fisternæ. The crossing of the Tolenus and Himella should give us no trouble whatever. We would pass south of Cliternia and north of Fisternæ. Chryseros questioned Agathemer closely as to his knowledge of the byroads, and applauded him highly, only on a few points correcting him or amplifying what he knew. North of Fisternæ we could gain the mountains and work northwards.

The most dangerous part of our proposed route, the critical

point of our escape, would be the crossing of the Avens and the Salarian Highway, which we must effect somewhere near Forum Decii, between Interocrium and Falacrinum. Once in the mountains we should be able easily to continue on northwards into Umbria.

Chryseros suggested that, once in Umbria, we could pass ourselves off as buyers of cattle, goats and mules, all of which were bred on the mountain farms and regularly bought up by itinerant dealers who drove them or had them driven to Rome. The Umbrian mountains had no such numbers of these animals as Sabinum produced and their quality was far inferior, so that the dealers were always men of small means, driving close bargains.

All this sounded very promising and, about half way between sunrise and noon, he left us to hide for the rest of the day. I slept well and woke feeling almost myself, with merely trifling discomfort from my fast healing wounds.

When Chryseros returned in the dusk, I ate ravenously. He brought us good, coarse tunics and cloaks, also hats, shoes, and belts; and for each of us, a small leather case containing two good needles and a little hank of strong linen thread. We talked in subdued tones, as before, and kept it up until long after dark.

Next morning I woke full of hope and eager to be off. Chryseros brought our wallets and we packed them with everything they were to hold except most of the food. We had a long wrangle over the money, as Chryseros wanted to force on us more silver than I thought it safe to carry.

That night, after a generous meal and a long final talk with Chryseros, we set off to sneak our way into the Aemilian Estate and from there eastward. Before we set off Chryseros insisted on hanging round each of our necks, by the usual leathern thong, one of those tiny, flat leathern pouches, in which slaves were accustomed to wear protective amulets. He declared that these contained talismans of great potency and of inestimable value to us in our flight, as in any risk or venture. At the moment of parting, to my amazement, he

burst into tears, threw his arms around me, held me close and clung to me sobbing, and kissing me as if I had been his own son. As we moved off I could still hear his sobs.

We had excellent luck. Hiding by day and threading devious paths by night we reached and passed the Avens and the Salarian Highway without any encounter with any human being; and indeed without near proximity to any. Our daytime hiding-places all turned out to have been well chosen and no one approached us in any one of them. The moon, which was in her first quarter on the night of our setting out, helped us nightly. There was no rain and only some moderate cloudiness, enough to be helpful at the time of the full moon, when there was enough light all night for us to see to travel at a good rate of speed and without any error at forks in the paths; and yet not enough light to make us conspicuous to any who might be abroad late at night.

Once beyond the Nar and almost at the borders of Umbria, we grew bolder, travelled by day, bought food as we needed it, put up at inns and acted the character we had assumed, of Sabines intent on stock-buying in the Umbrian mountains. No one appeared to suspect us and we had no adventures.

But, inevitably, once we had escaped, we did not so much think of immediate danger as of permanent safety. Chrysceros had confirmed our instinctive opinion that, as Sabines, we should be much less likely to arouse suspicion in Umbria and the Po Valley than in Samnium, Lucania or Bruttium. We had never thought of escape southward; northward we had meant to work our way, from the instant of conceiving the idea of escaping. But we had no settled, coherent plan as to how to achieve safety and keep alive. We could not hide in the mountains indefinitely.

We both agreed that we could hide best in a large city. Marseilles might have been a perfect hiding-place could we have reached it, full as it always was of riff-raff from all the shores of the Mediterranean and from all parts of Italy. But Marseilles we could reach only by the Aurelian Highway, through Genoa along the coast, and the Aurelian Highway

was certain to be sown with spies and likely enough might be travelled upon by officials who had known me from childhood and would probably know me through any disguise.

Aquileia, on the other hand, was far more populous than Marseilles, even more a congeries of rabble from all shores and districts, even more easy-going. In Aquileia we should be able to earn a comfortable living by not too onerous activities and to be wholly unsuspected. Towards Aquileia we decided to try to make our way. The roads, being less travelled, would be less spied-on and we should meet officials less likely to recognize me.

But, if we were to reach Aquileia, we must husband our silver. Agathemer's idea was that, from where we reached the borders of Umbria, somewhere between Trebia and Nursia, we should keep as near as possible to the chine of the mountain-chain, using the roads, paths, tracks or trails highest up the slope of the mountains; avoiding being seen as much as possible, and, if we were seen, claiming to have lost our way through misunderstanding the directions given us by the last natives we had met. He proposed to steal food for us, instead of buying it, and expounded his ideas, maintaining that it would be easy and not dangerous.

We tried his plan and succeeded well with it. So wild and untravelled were the districts which we traversed that, nearly half the time, we were welcomed at farmsteads, (to which welcome Agathemer's flageolet-playing greatly assisted us), invited to spend the night and had lavished upon our entertainment all their rustic abundance, so that we visibly grew fat. When such luck did not befall us we had no trouble in helping ourselves to supplies, for, far up the mountains, most habitations were shacks tenanted only in summer and only by lads acting as goat-herds or herdsmen, who spent the day abroad with their charges, so that we could readily enter their deserted cabins and take what we pleased; especially as, if a dog had been left to guard the hut, I could always master him so that he greeted me fawning and stood wagging his tail as we made off.

Except these not very risky raids for provender and such

encounters as called for more than usually ingenious lying from Agathemer, we had no adventures.

But we realized from day to day and more and more insistently, that we were progressing slowly, far slower than we had anticipated. It was plain that we could not hope to reach Aquileia before winter set in. It was manifest that it would be unsafe to attempt to winter anywhere in the Po valley between the mountains and Aquileia. At Ravenna, Bononia or Padua we should be noticed, investigated and perhaps recognized: anywhere in the open country, at any village or farm, we should, even more certainly excite suspicion. We must winter in the mountains. But how or where?

The question was solved for us by our first considerable adventure. I never knew the precise locality. We had, in traversing the mountains trails, avoided any semblance of ignorance of our general locality and had sedulously refrained from asking any questions except as to our way to some nearby objective, generally imaginary. All I know is that we were somewhere on the northeastern slope of the long chain of mountains beyond Iguvium and Tifernum perhaps near the headwaters of the Sena. On the morning of our adventure we were on a long spur of the main range, so that we were headed not northwest but northeast. The weather was still fine and warm, but autumn was not far off. We hadn't seen a habitation since that at which we had passed the night, and we had made about three leagues since we left it, following what was at first a good mountain road, but which grew worse and worse till it became a mere trail.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LONELY HUT

SOME TIME before noon we were threading a barely visible track not far below the crest of the spur, a track bordered and overshadowed by chestnuts and beeches, but chestnuts and beeches intermingled with not a few pines

and firs, when, out of the bushes on our left hand, from the up slope above us, appeared a large mouse-colored Molossian dog, very lean and starved looking. I first saw his big, square-jowled, short-muzzled head peering out between some low cornel bushes, his brown eyes regarding me questioningly.

He fawned on me, of course, and I made friends with him, fondled him, pulled his ears and played with him a while.

Agathemer tartly enquired whether we really had time to waste on skylarking with strange dogs. I laughed, picked up my wallet, and started to follow him as he swung round and strode on, ordering the dog to go back home, a command which, from me, almost always won instant compliance and disembarrassed me of any casual roadside friends.

But the dog did not obey. He pawed at me, whined, and caught my cloak in his teeth, tugging at it and whining. I could not induce him to let go, could not shake him off, and was much puzzled. Agathemer, impatient and irritated, halted again and urged our need of haste.

After exhausting every wile by which I had been accustomed to rid myself of too fond animals, I began to realize that the dog did not want to follow us, did not want us to remain where we were and go on playing with him, but, as plainly as if he spoke Latin, he was begging us to accompany him somewhere.

I said to Agathemer:

"I'm going with this dog; come along."

He remonstrated.

I declared that I had an intuition that to follow the dog was the right thing to do. Agathemer, contemptuous and reluctant, yielded. The dog led us along an all but undistinguishable track through densely growing trees, up steep slopes and out into a flattish glade or clearing at the brow of the slope, overhung by merely a few hundred feet of wooded mountain side and bare cliffs to the crest. The clearing was clothed in soft, late, second-growth grass, and had plainly been mown at haying time and pastured on since. In it we found some well-built, well-thatched farm-buildings:

a sheepfold, a goatpen, a cowshed, a strongly built structure like a granary or store-house, another like a repository for wine-jars and oil-jars; hovels such as all mountain farms have for slave-quarters and a house or cabin little better than a hut, mud-walled, like the other buildings, but new thatched. It was nearly square and had no ridge-pole, the four slopes of the roof running together, at the top, yet not into a point, but as if there were a smoke-vent: in fact I thought I saw a suggestion of smoke rising from the peak of the roof.

To this hut the dog led us. The heavy door of weathered, rough-hewn oak was shut, but, when I pushed it, proved to be unfastened. I found myself looking into a largish room, roofed with rough rafters from which hung what might have been hams, flitches and cheeses. It was mud-walled and had a floor of beaten earth, in which was a sand-pit, nearly full of ashes and with a small fire smouldering in the middle of it. Opposite me was a rough plank partition with two doors in it, both open. Against the partition, between the doors, hung bronze lamps, iron pots and pottery jars. The room was dim, lighted only from the door, in which I stood, and from the narrow smoke-vent overhead.

By the fire, on their hands and knees, and apparently poking at it, each with a bit of wood, or about to lay the bits of wood on it, were two little girls, shock-headed, barefoot and bare-legged, clad only in coarse tunics of rusty dark wool. I am not accurate as to children's ages: I took these girls for seven and five; but they may have been six and four or eight and six. At sight of us they scrambled to their feet and fled through one of the doors, one shrieking, the other screaming:

"Mamma! Mamma! Strange men! Strange men!"

In her panic she did not attempt to shut the door behind her and bolt it, both of which, as I afterwards discovered, she might have done.

No other voices came to our ears and I followed the children into the rear room in which they had taken refuge. It was totally dark, except for what light found its way

through its door, and was cramped and small and half filled by a Gallic bed. I had never seen a Gallic bed before. Such a bed is made like the body of a travelling-carriage or travelling litter, entirely encased in panelling, topped off with a sort of flat roof of panelling, and with sliding panels above the level of the cording, so that the occupants can shut themselves in completely; a structure which looks to a novice like a device for smothering its occupants, but which is a welcome retreat and shelter on cold, windy, winter nights, as I have learned by later experience. As this was my first sight of one I was amazed at it.

Usually, as I learned later, such a bedstead is piled up with feather-beds, so that the occupant is much above the level of the top edge of the lower front on which the panels slide. But this bed was poorly provided with mattresses and I had to stare down into it to descry the children's mother, who lay like a corpse in a coffin, but half buried in bedding and quilts, only her face visible. She was certainly alive, for her breathing was loud and stertorous; but she was, quite certainly, unconscious. Between the shrieking children, who clung to the frame of the bed, I spoke to her and assured her that we were friends. She gave no sign of understanding me, of hearing me, of knowing of my presence; but my repeated assurances quieted the elder girl, who not only ceased screaming but endeavored to calm her little sister.

Seeing her so sensible, I questioned the child. All I could learn from her was that her father had been away nearly ten days, her mother ill for five and insensible for three and their four slaves had run away the day before, taking everything they chose to carry off. I then examined the other room which had a similar bed in it, and in which, the child told me, she and her sister slept. She declared that she did not know her mother's name, that her father never called her anything but "mother"; she also declared that she did not know her father's name, her mother, always calling him "father," as she and her sister did. Her name was Prima and her sister's Secunda.

As I could not rouse the woman and learned that the slaves had been gone more than a full day, Agathemer and I went to save the bellowing and bleating stock. We found in the shed two fine young cows with udders appallingly distended. But our attention was momentarily distracted from them by the sight of eight full-sized bronze pails, finer than those at any public well in Reate or Consentia, which hung on pegs by the door, four on each side of it. They were flat-bottomed, bulged, but narrowed at the rim so that no water would splash out in carrying. The rims were ornamented with chased or cast patterns, scallops, leaves, egg and dart and wall of Troy: four patterns, showing that they were pairs. All had heavy double handles. We looked for carrying-yokes, but could see none. Such pails, which would be the treasures of any village and the pride of most towns, amazed us in this fastness. Glancing at the pails took us less time than it does to tell of it. The cows needed us sorely and we each picked up one of the suitable earthenware jars which stood inverted just inside the shed door and milked them at once. Agathemer said he thought we were in time to forestall any serious and permanent harm to them. But their udders were frightfully swelled and blood came with the milk from one teat of the cow I attended to.

The sheep were in a worse state than the cows. Not a lamb was visible; besides the ewes there was only a two-year-old ram penned by himself in a corner of the fold. There were eight fine young ewes, in full milk. As with one cow, so among these ewes, four gave bloody milk from one teat each, and we milked that onto the earth. We found plenty of empty earthenware crocks, clean and turned upside down, in which to save the good milk.

The he-goat, a noble young specimen, was penned by himself, like the ram. There were nineteen she-goats, with not a kid anywhere, yet all in full milk and far worse off than the ewes. All but two gave bloody milk and three gave no clean milk. These three I judged might die, but Agathemer vowed he could save them.

When we had finished milking we searched about for

water. Towards the northeast the clearing narrowed and here we came upon a tiny rill trickling through a fringe of sedge. It came from a clear and abundant spring in a cleft of rock against the sharp up slope which rose there under the pines. At the lower edge of that part of the clearing, near the margin of the more nearly level ground, just before it plunged over the rim of the flat, it was dammed into a drinking pool for the stock. We did not dare let them out to drink and so laboriously carried water, I from the spring and Agathemer from the pond, using each a pair of the bronze pails, pouring the water into the troughs made of hollow logs, which were set, one to each, in the shed, pen and fold. We kept this up till every goat and ewe had had her fill, and then watered the he-goat and ram. The cows, of course, we had watered first. After the watering we gave each cow a feed of mixed barley and millet and then filled with hay all the mangers and racks.

When we had concluded this exhausting toil we filled the water-jar which stood in one corner of the cabin and then carried some milk into the house, and offered Prima and Secunda whichever they preferred. They chose ewe's milk and drank their fill. Prima was much impressed by the dog's confidence in me and seemed to give me hers. She said the dog's name was Hylactor. I tried to make the mother drink some cow's milk, but she swallowed only a few drops which I forced through her teeth by the help of a small horn spoon which I found on the floor of the outer room.

Agathemer roused the fire and piled more wood on it. There were no less than seven tripods lying about the floor of the cabin, but all roughly made and of the squat, short-legged pattern which holds a pot barely clear of a low bed of coals; not one was fit to hold a cauldron over a newly made deep fire of half-caught wood.

On the tallest of them, or rather on that least squatty, Agathemer set a small pot, which he filled with fresh water. When he had this where it seemed likely to boil and certain

to heat, he ferretted about for supplies. He found a brick oven with about half a baking of bread in it; medium-sized loaves of coarse wheat bread. Two forked sticks stood in one corner of the cabin and with one he lifted from its peg in the rafters a partly used flitch of good coarse bacon. There was a jar more than half full of olive oil by the sticks in the same corner of the cabin. In a small pot set in the ashes Agathemer stewed some of the onions he lifted down from the rafters. In the other corner of the cabin was an amphora nearly full of harsh, sour wine. We made a full meal of bread, onions, bacon, olives and some raisins, drinking our fill of the wine. The little girls ate heartily with us, now convinced that we were friends and accepting us as such. They seemed to some extent habituated to their mother's condition of helplessness and insensibility.

As soon as we had fed we inspected the place. The glade or clearing was enclosed all around by the tall trees of a thick primitive forest. Towards the up slope and the cliffs below the crest of the mountain the trees were all pines, firs or such-like dark and somber evergreens. There were a few of these also on the lower slopes, but there, as along all that rim of the clearing, the forest was mostly of oak, beech, chestnut and other cheerful trees. Their tops towered far above the verge of the slope and screened the clearing all round. Nowhere could we catch sight of any sign of a town, village or farmstead, though there were three several rifts in the forest through which we could see far into the valleys to the eastward. The cliff above the clearing ran nearly from southwest to northeast, so that the place was well situated towards the sun.

The cow-shed was divided by a partition and half of it had been used for stabling mules. Agathemer judged that no mule had been in it for about ten days. We inferred that the children's father had taken the mules with him when he departed. Over the cow-shed was a loft, well stored with good hay, as were the smaller lofts over the sheds which formed one side of the sheepfold and goat-pen. The hay

was not mountain hay, but distinctly meadow hay, such as is mown in valleys along streams. It was all in bundles, such bundles as are carried on mule-back, two to a mule. This was queer; even queerer the absence of any fowls or pigeons, or of any sign that any had ever been about the place. An Umbrian mountain farm without pigeons was unthinkable.

In the granary we found an amazingly large store of excellent barley, but only two jars of wheat, and that not very good, and neither jar entirely full. On the floor were loose piles of turnips, beets and of dried pods of coarse beans. There were jars of chick-peas, cow-peas, lentils, beans and millet, more millet than wheat. From the rafters hung dried bean-bushes, with the pods on; long strings of onions, dried herbs, marjoram, thyme, sage, bay-leaves and other such seasonings, dried peppers, strung like the onions, and bunches of big sweet raisins. Also many rush-mats of dried figs, the biggest and best of figs, some of them indubitably Caunean figs. On the floor, in heaps, were some hard-headed cabbages, only one or two spoiled. It was a very ample store and we marvelled at it and wondered whence it all came and how it came where it was.

The other store-house amazed us. It was, as we had conjectured, full of great jars; jars of wine, of olive oil, of pickled olives, of pickled fish, of pickled pork, of vinegar, of plums in vinegar, and smaller jars of honey, sauces and prepared relishes. The rafters were set full of cornel-wood pegs till they looked like weavers-combs. From the pegs hung hams, flitches, strings of smoked sausage, cheeses of all sizes, smoked so heavily that they appeared mere lumps of soot, and bags of a shape unfamiliar to both of us. Agathemer knocked one down and opened it. It was full of tight packed fish, salted, dried and smoked, a fish of a kind unknown to us.

There was, along the upper edge of the clearing, under the boughs of the pine trees, a huge pile of trimmed logs of oak, chestnut, pine and fir, with a scarcely smaller heap of cut lengths of boughs and branches. Under a lean-to shed

was a small store of cut fire-wood. In a corner of the same shed were four big cornel-wood mauls and eleven good iron wedges, not one of them bearing any sign of ever having been used, but appearing as if fresh from the maker's hands. By the woodpile were four even heavier mauls, showing plenty of marks of hard usage and near them or about the woodpile we found eight rusty wedges.

We could find no axe, hatchet or any other such tool anywhere about the place. The logs and six-foot lengths of boughs afforded a lavish supply of fuel for two long winters; the cut fire-wood could not be made to keep the fire going ten days.

The slave-quarters, as I said, were mere hovels, but they were provided with bedding, quilts, and stores of clothing by no means such as are generally used for slaves. Slaves' quilts are mostly old and worn, made of patches of woollen or linen cloth all but worn out by previous use; and then, when torn, patched with a patch on a patch and a patch on that. These quilts were the best of their kind, such as ladies of leisure make for their own amusement, of squares and triangles of woolen stuff unworn and unsoiled. The mattresses were stuffed with dried grass or sedge, craftily packed to make a soft bed for any sleeper. The pillows were of lambs' wool, as good as the best pillows. And, in a big chest in each hovel, were good, new, clean tunics, cloaks, rain-cloaks, and with them sandals, shoes, hats, rain-hats and all sorts of clothing, not as if for slaves, but as if for middle-class farmers, prosperous and self-indulgent.

We were dumbfounded at such abundance in such a place.

By each bed in the hut was a chest. These we opened and found in both women's clothing; tunics, robes, cloaks and rolls of linen and fine woolen stuffs.

The woman, although moaning and stirring in her bed, gave no more signs of life than when we first saw her. Agathemer said, speaking Greek so the children would not understand:

"We must try to save this woman's life. You manage to

get the children to follow you outside and I'll lift her out of the bed, and wash her, put a clean tunic on her, put clean bedding in the bed and put her back in it; I can do all that handily. She is so ill she will never know."

We went out in the slave-hovels and chose what bedding seemed suitable and carried it into the hut. Agathemer had put more fuel on the fire and set a big pot of water on the tripod. We put the bedding in a corner of the hut and selected from the contents of the chests a tunic and some rough towels, of which there were some in each chest.

I was not hopeful of being able to wheedle the children; but my first attempt was a complete success. I suggested to Prima that she tell me the names of the sheep and goats and she at once became absorbed in instructing me. Each had a name, she was certain; but, I found, very uncertain as to which name belonged to which and not very sure of some of the names. Her hesitations and efforts to remember took up so much time that we were still at the goat-pen, Secunda with one hand clinging confidingly to mine, when Agathemer called to me from the door of the hut.

He told me in Greek that he had done all he could for the woman, had effaced all traces of his activities and had put the soiled bedding out in the late sunshine to dry and air. We strolled about the clearing, remarking again that it seemed out of sight from any possible inhabited or travelled viewpoint. Agathemer fetched a rough ladder he had seen in the cow-shed, set it against the hut, which was highest on the slope, and climbed to the top of its roof. From there, he said, he could descry nothing in any direction which looked like a town, village, farmstead or bit of highway. The place was well hidden, by careful calculation, for this could not have come about by accident.

We peered into each of the buildings and poked about in them, hoping to find an axe or hatchet, and marvelling that a place so liberally, so lavishly, so amazingly oversupplied with hams, flitches, sausages and other such food should show nowhere any trace of the presence of hogs. There

was no hog-pen nor any place where one might have been, nor did any part of the clearing show any signs indicating a former wallow, nor had any portion of it been rooted up. It was very puzzling.

As we returned to the house, about an hour before sunset, we simultaneously uttered, in Greek:

"Here we stay——"

"Go on," said I checking.

"Here we stay," he began again, "until the husband comes home, or, if he does not return, until spring."

"That is my idea, also," I said, "and there is but one drawback."

"Pooh," said Agathemer, "if we do not find an axe somewhere hereabouts I'll steal one from a farm if I have to spend two days and a night on the quest."

We agreed that there was no question but that we must spend the night where we were. The stock, after their long neglect and late milking, would be best left unmilked and unwatered till morning. As we must not leave the woman unwatched, we must sleep in the hut. We could bring in sedge mattresses and quilts from the hovels and sleep on the earth floor by the fire. When we had agreed on these points we forced some more milk on the semi-unconscious woman, gave the stock more hay, ate an abundant meal of bread, oil, sausages broiled over the fire on a spit, olives and raisins; and, soon after sunset, composed ourselves to sleep by the well-covered fire, leaving open the door into the woman's bedroom, but shutting the two children into theirs after telling them by no means to stir until we called them in the morning.

Hylactor curled up outside the cabin door, almost against it, after Agathemer had convinced him that we would not let him sleep in the hut. We slept unbrokenly till dawn woke us.

It was cold before sunrise so high up the mountains. My face felt cold even inside the hut and by the smouldering fire. I was reluctant to roll out of my quilts. But,

what with Agathemer's urgings and my own realization of what was required, I did my share of the milking, watering and feeding of the stock and ate a hearty breakfast. For, as when hiding in Furfur's woods, as when anywhere on our escape, since it was not possible to eat as if at home and at ease, we ate our fill soon after dawn and again before dark, but during the day we ate nothing. We had from necessity already formed the habit of two meals a day, at sunrise and sunset.

The woman seemed less violently ill than the day before. When we first saw her she had been in the throes of a violent fever and it had lasted until after Agathemer bathed her. From then on it seemed to abate, but, when I last felt her forehead and hands before we lay down to sleep, she was still feverish. When we first went to her in the morning she was unconscious and as if in a stupor, but showed no signs of fever. She did not struggle against feeding as on the previous day, but swallowed, a spoonful at a time, as much milk as Agathemer thought good for her.

When we had done what seemed necessary Agathemer suggested that I remain by the cabin while he investigated the woods round the clearing to make sure how many roads or paths led out of it. He proposed to carry his sheath-knife and the stout and tried staff which had helped him along the mountain trails, as a similar one had helped me, and to take Hylactor with him: to make a circuit about the clearing some ten yards or so inside the forest and, if necessary a second circuit, further away from our glade. These two circuits should make him sure how many tracks led from or to our clearing. Then he would follow each track and acquaint himself with it, and, if possible, learn where it led. I approved.

Before noon he reported that only three tracks approached our location; that by which we had reached it up the slope of the mountain, and one along the slope in each direction. About mid-afternoon he returned up the track by which we had come, stating that the trail southwards, about

a league south of us, joined the road along which we had travelled till Hylactor diverted us: he had made the circuit along the length of the league or more of trail, back along the road by which we had travelled and up the track by which Hylactor had led us; he had met no living thing, save a hare or two, too fleet for Hylactor to catch; he had caught sight of no town, village or farmstead, even afar. He had made sure that the mules had left the clearing by the track he had followed out of it, so that, probably, the children's father had gone south. Exploring the other trail he had put off till the next day.

Next day he found that the other track joined the lower road only about half a league to northeastwards. He turned back along the lower road and returned by the uphill track, as he had done the day before to the south. He met no one and saw no town, village or farmstead anywhere in sight, and at some places he could see far to the eastward.

We discussed his proposal to go off alone, with a wallet of food and try to steal an axe. Plainly he would have to go far. It would be easy enough to sneak back to the farm where we had spent our last night before meeting Hylactor, but we both felt bound by the obligation of our hospitable entertainment there: though nameless fugitives we were still under the spell of the standards of our former lives. We admitted to each other that he might steal an axe from that farm and I condone the knavery and avail myself of its proceeds; but we agreed that such baseness must be stooped to only as a desperate last resort. He was to set off northwards next day.

That night the woman, who had been inert and manageable, in a half-stupor, became violently delirious and for a time it took all the strength Agathemer and I jointly possessed to hold her in bed. Prima and Secunda, waked by her shrieks, were in a pitiable panic, Secunda merely dazed and aghast, Prima begging us not to kill her mother, fancying we were attacking her. We managed to convince the child that we were doing our best and what was best for her mother

and that her mother's ravings would quiet and that she might regain her reason and health. I induced both children to return to their bed and shut and bolted their door. Agathemer and I, by turns, and twice again each helping the other, kept the poor woman in her bed all night. At dawn she quieted and fell into a profound stupor. But the vigil left me and Agathemer worn out. We attended to the milking, feeding and watering of the stock and then I went to sleep in one of the slave hovels, which were free from vermin, not the least amazing of the many amazing features of our place of sojourn.

This outbreak of our insensible hostess made impossible the immediate execution of Agathemer's project. He had to have adequate rest before he could set off. After I had slept all the morning, he slept most of the afternoon. During his nap I found, behind the water-jar in the hut, a hatchet-head, with the handle broken off and what was left of it jammed in the hole. It was small, but not very rusty or dull. Before Agathemer wakened I had it well sharpened. We had found a mallet in the storehouse, and, with this and a cornel-wood peg he whittled with his sheath-knife, Agathemer drove out the broken bit of hatchet handle. He then fashioned with his sheath-knife a good handle of tough, seasoned ash from a piece he had found in one of the buildings. With this hatchet we could cut up small boughs selected from the big woodpile, but it was too small to enable us to cut logs into lengths or split lengths of logs.

Again, when Agathemer was planning for the next day his axe-stealing expedition, the woman had a fit of raving. This lasted a night, a day and a night and left both of us to the last degree weary and drowsy. Before we had recuperated our firewood was almost used up. The situation looked hopeless. It was well along into the Autumn, though we were now unsure of what month we were in, so completely had we lost count of the days. Again Agathemer projected an expedition for the next day, in the faint hope of obtaining us an axe, and I feared he now aimed for our last harborage. At dusk, as he hunted for small wood under the margin of

the woodpile, he found a good, big, double-edged axe-head. It was dull and very rusty, and he had a vast deal of trouble getting out the fragment of broken handle and shaping a new handle, in which he was greatly helped by a fairly good draw-knife, which I had that very morning found hanging on a peg behind the hay in the loft over the cow-shed. He had quite as much trouble in fitting the handle into the axe-head and in sharpening both edges. But he did all that before we composed ourselves to sleep. Besides those on the partition we had found a score of fine bronze lamps and we had olive oil enough for all uses for two winters.

Next morning we woke to find all our world buried under a foot of snow, the pines laden with it, the boughs of the beeches, oaks and chestnuts furred with it along their tops. It was a magic outlook, the like of which neither of us had ever seen.

After that, all through the winter, our life was an unvarying routine of milking, feeding and watering the stock, preparing and eating meals limited only by our appetites, nursing the sick woman, and chopping firewood. From the first streak of dawn till the last gleam of twilight one or the other of us chopped the firewood. Neither of us was an adept at handling an axe. But Agathemer, with his half Greek ancestry and his wholly Greek versatility and adaptability, taught himself to be a good axeman in ten days. I bungled and blundered away at it all winter. Agathemer could cut a two-foot oak log into suitable lengths with a minimum of effort, with clean, effective strokes of the ringing axe, the cuts sharp and even; I could cut any log into lengths and enjoyed the effort, but I sweated over it and laid half my strokes awry, so that the ends of my lengths were notched and unsightly.

Also I broke five several axe-helves in the course of the winter. The first time I broke a helve Agathemer had no substitute ready, and, what was more, the fragment of the old helve was in so tight that he had to burn it out in the fire and then retemper and resharpen our one precious axe-head. His retempering and resharpening turned out all

right, but he said his success was accidental and he might ruin the axe if he tried again. So he made two extra helves and had a dozen cornel-wood pegs ready to drive out the bit of broken handle next time I broke it; as I did, according to his laughing forecast.

The incessant labor of our days hardened both of us. Our muscles were like steel rods. We slept on our mattresses by that ash-covered fire as I had never slept at Villa Andivia or at my mansion in Rome. We ate enormously and relished every mouthful.

Riving lengths of logs with wedges and maul was a kind of work calling for no special skill; Agathemer taught me all he knew in a day or two. All winter we alternated this work with woodchopping, afterwards chopping the riven lengths into firewood lengths and then splitting these into firewood. Although we worked at riving and chopping and splitting every moment of daylight when we were not busy at something else, we never accumulated any comfortable store of firewood, so as to be able to rest even one day. We drank new milk by the quart, with both our meals; wine, abundantly as we were supplied with it and good as it proved to be, we drank sparingly, merely a draught at waking, one after each meal, and one at bedtime. What we took we took strong, mixing wine and water in equal proportions.

Both Agathemer and I preferred cows' milk and drank that only, as we gave cows' milk only to the sick woman. Both children preferred ewes' milk. As we had no hogs to feed we were put to it what to do with our surplus milk. Agathemer made a sort of soft cheese, by putting sour curds in a bag and hanging it up to drain. We both liked this and so did the little girls. But we could not use much this way. Agathemer, always resourceful, fed the dog all the goat's milk he would lap up, and, after he had set to curdle what seemed enough, mixed the rest, while fresh and sweet, with water and gave this mixture to the cows to drink, saying it increased their yield of milk. As the winter wore on he fed similarly the best milkers among the ewes and goats.

CHAPTER XIV

WINTER IN THE MOUNTAINS

NEITHER Agathemer nor I knew anything about bread-making. He tried, but merely wasted flour. And both of us hated the wearisome labor of grinding grain in either of the rough hand-mills which were in the store-house. He found a means of keeping us well fed, satisfied and looking forward to the next meal with pleasure. He screened a peck or so of barley, put it to soak in a crock, and then, when it was swelled, put it in a crock or flat-bottomed jar, with just enough water to cover it, and bedded this in the hot coals by the edge of the fire. There, under a tight lid, it stewed and swelled and steamed all day, unless he judged it done sooner. When it was cooked to his taste he mixed through it cheese, raisins, and several sorts of flavorings, also a little honey. The porridge-like product he baked, as it were, by turning a larger crock over the crock containing it. The result was always tasty and relishable.

I asked him why he used barley, not wheat, of which there was quite a supply. He said barley was supposed to be heating, and we certainly needed all the heating we could get.

The old smoked cheeses, of which an amazing number hung in the hut and store-houses, were, to me, very appetizing, used in this way, though too strongly flavored for me to eat any quantity of any sort as one would eat normal cheese. Agathemer said they had all been smoked too soon, while the cheese was yet soft, so that the smoke had penetrated all through the cheese. Certainly the outside of each cheese was mere soot to the depth of an inch, so that we had to throw it away. Even Hylactor would not eat it.

Soon after the first hard freeze we found, one morning, one of the goats with a leg broken. Agathemer, with me to help him, got her out into one of the buildings, out of sight

or hearing of the other animals; and, there later, butchered her. We had, by this time, found butchering knives and kitchen knives, to the number of a score, but each hidden by itself, and in the oddest places, one under a sill of the cow-shed, another under a wine-jar, several between the rafters and thatch, most buried in the thatch itself, as if they had been hidden on purpose. They were all rusty, but we soon had them bright and sharp. With some of these we butchered and cut up the goat. The offal we fed to Hylactor, not much at a time. Most of the rest of her we ate, a little at a time, as the frost kept the meat from spoiling.

The kidneys Agathemer used first. He washed them, soaked them, parboiled them, cut them into bits, fried the bits in olive oil, and then, when they were crisp, stirred some of them through one of his crocks of cooked barley. The result was delicious. The kidneys sufficed for two or three crocks of barley. Then he did something similar with the liver with a result almost as appetizing.

We had some chops, broiled over the hot coals; also collops, spitted, with bits of fat bacon between. But neither of us cared much for goat's meat, and Agathemer's attempt at a broth made of the tougher meat was not a success. It had a repulsive smell and a more repulsive taste, though it seemed nourishing. He made only one pot of broth. After that we fed the coarser parts, little by little, to Hylactor.

This loss of one goat led Agathemer to do some thinking. There was a pretty large supply of hay, but not enough to keep in good milk all through the winter, until grass grew next spring, two cows, eight ewes and twenty goats. We talked the matter over. The ram and the he-goat were manifestly of choice breeding stock, probably carefully selected and cherished. We judged their owner would be angry if he did not find them on his return. So Agathemer considered which of the ewes gave the least milk and promised least as a breeder, and, after all the goat's meat was used up, we killed her. Sheep's-kidneys and sheep's-liver are better eating than goat's-kidneys and goat's-liver. We both agreed on that and we liked mutton chops and mutton

cutlets. Hylactor got only the offal and the coarser bits, the rest Agathemer made into a relishable broth flavored with marjoram, bay-leaves and other herbs.

During the winter he killed six more goats and one more ewe, so that we fed, all winter, six ewes and twelve goats. For these the hay sufficed and not a little was left when we departed.

For ourselves, while we wasted nothing, we were lavish with the food stores. The bitter cold and our unremitting toil all day long, at a thousand other tasks and always at preparing fire-wood, contributed to keep us ravenous. We ate heartily twice a day, never taking anything between meals except all the milk we chose to drink, and I found ewes' milk and goats' milk, yet warm, or milked that morning, good to drink in cold weather. Often we mixed hot water with the goats' milk and drank the mixture while warm.

One intensely cold and brilliantly clear day, as I was riving a log, panting and glowing with the labor, yet with fingers numb and feet aching with the cold, I heard a yell from Agathemer. Axe in hand, my left hand making sure that my knife was loose in its sheath, where I wore it stuck in my belt, I raced to the store-house. There I found Agathemer alone, unhurt, standing by an olive-jar, staring into it.

"What is wrong?" I queried.

"Nothing wrong," he said, "but something amazing."

He fumbled in the jar, reaching his arm down into it as far as he could, his arm-pit tight down on the rim. After some straining he held up his hand, all dripping with dregs, and, between his thumb and forefinger, exhibited an unmistakable gold coin. How many there were in that jar we never knew; there were too many to count. We turned the jar over on its side, with some labor, and made sure that there were enough gold coins in it to weigh more than either I or Agathemer weighed and we were about normal-sized men, in every way.

We discussed this find a good deal. We agreed that the coins were of no use to us and could be of no use to us. As we meant to pass ourselves off for Sabine cattle-buyers until

we were out of Umbria, as we meant to press on to Aquileia, as soon as the weather was warm enough, as we meant to pass ourselves off for runaway slaves, if we were arrested and questioned gold coins in our possession would have been most dangerous to us. We agitated the idea of sewing a few into the hems of our tunics and into the ends of our belts; but we came to the conclusion that any attempt to exchange a gold coin for silver would be very dangerous and much too risky a venture.

We also agreed that if the master of the place returned he must not suspect that we knew of his hoard. So we replaced the jar as it had stood, effaced all signs of its having been moved and refilled it with olives, taking them from another jar, which proved to contain olives only, all the way to the bottom.

This find led Agathemer to investigate every jar on the place, running a long rod of tough wood down into each as a sounder. In another jar of olives he found a similar hoard of silver denarii. Of these we took as many as were necessary to replenish the store of coins Chryseros had furnished us with. Even of silver we dared not carry too much. The hoard was so large that the handful of coins we took was unlikely ever to be missed.

The little girls, early in our stay, became entirely accustomed to us and utterly trustful of us. In the chests Agathemer found other tunics, warmer than those they had on when we came, which were suited to them. But there were no cloaks small enough for them to wear. With our precious scissors Agathemer cut in two the smallest warm cloak he could find and, with the needles and thread Chryseros had given us, he roughly hemmed the cut edge. The two awkwardly-shaped cloaks, thus made, the children wore till spring.

We could find no shoes for the children and they went barelegged and barefooted all the winter. They did not seem to mind it, except on the most bitterly cold days, when the wind howled about the hut, roaring through the pines and naked-boughed oaks, blowing before it the snow in silver dust. Then they kept inside the hut all day. But, on sunny

and windless days, they ran about barefoot in the snow and seemed entirely indifferent to the cold, though they always appeared glad to dry and warm their little pink toes at the fire, after they returned to the hut. Agathemer, more knowing than I, would not let them approach the fire until they had bathed their feet in a crock of water he kept standing ready inside the hut door and had partially dried them afterwards. He said that otherwise their feet would puff and swell and perhaps inflame. They seemed happy-hearted little beings and Secunda was bright. But Prima was very dull and less intelligent than her younger sister. We concluded that she was, while not anything like an idiot, certainly a very backward child, lacking the wit of a normal child of her age.

After the first snow fell we had no more trouble with violent outbreaks from the sick woman; or, at least, very little. Her next fit of raving came about ten days after the first snowfall and began in the daytime, when both Agathemer and I were in the hut. We forced her back into her bed and then Agathemer had an inspiration. He bade me hold her where she was and he took down his flageolet, from where it hung on a high peg on the partition, and began to play it.

The woman quieted at once and seemed to sink to sleep. After that her fits, which recurred at frequent intervals, took up little of our time, as upon each we had only to get her back into her bed and compose her by means of Agathemer's music.

It was well along towards spring, certainly far towards the end of the winter, when Agathemer made his most astonishing discovery. By that time the animals gave no more milk than sufficed for the five of us; there was no surplus to feed back to the best milkers. Also we had a little reserve of firewood and did not have to drive ourselves so unremittingly to escape death by freezing if our fuel gave out.

I was chopping wood in a leisurely way, and enjoying the exercise. The little girls were inside the hut at the moment, after playing about most of the morning. Agathemer came

out of the store-house, glanced around, and beckoned to me: together we went inside. There he showed me where he, led by a very slight difference of color, had dug into the earth floor and come upon a small maple-wood chest, like a temple treasure-box. It was, outside, perhaps a foot wide and about as high, and not over a foot and a half long. He had forced it open with the hatchet and a heavy knife, like a Spartan wood-knife. The wood of the chest was so thick that the inside cavity was comparatively small. But it was big enough to have held, say, two quarts of wine. And it was almost full of jewels; opals, turquoises, topazes, amethysts, rubies, emeralds and sapphires.

Agathemer shut the store-house door and fastened it so the little girls could not open it if they should chance to try. Then he spread his cloak on the earth floor and dumped the contents of the chest on it. Most of the gems were small, at least two score were very large, and there were many, of notable, though moderate, size. We could see them fairly well, though the store-house was dim, since, with the door shut, the only light was what came through chinks. We ran our fingers through the heap of jewels, picked up the largest and held them to the light and gained a general idea of the value of the hoard. We put them all back into the chest, shut it, and reburied it. It showed no marks of Agathemer's dexterous attempts at opening it, for the lid was held down only by a clasp outside, and by the swelling of the inside flange of wood against the overlapping rim of the lid.

We went out to the woodpile and I resumed my chopping, while Agathemer set to riving logs with the wedges and maul. We had always kept the little girls away from the woodpile and so were sure of being alone. Also we talked Greek as an extra precaution.

Agathemer, resting between assaults on a very big log, said:

"I am of the same opinion I have held since we found the gold. This place belongs to some Umbrian farmer who is in partnership with a bandit chief or the leader of a gang of

footpads. Just as the King of the Highwaymen is said to have a brother in Rome, important among the Imperial spies, so most outlaws have some anchor somewhere with associates apparently honest and respectable. The owner of this place may be brother of a brigand, or related to one in some other way or merely a trusted friend. At any rate I am of the opinion that this fastness is used as a repository for robbers' loot. Everything points to it. The gems and the coins make it certain, to my thinking, but even if we had found none of these it is pretty plain from everything else. There is no sign that there ever was a pig anywhere about here: yet the store of fine old bacon surpasses anything any mere farm ever kept on hand; there is not a square yard of ground hereabouts that ever has been plowed, spaded or hoed: yet the place is crammed with all sorts of farm produce. Manifestly it was all brought here, where there are no pigeons to reveal the place by their flight above it, nor any cock to call attention to it by his crowing. This is not a farm, it is a treasure-house, lavishly provided with everything portable.

"The absence of the man and the flight of the slaves puzzles me. As for the slaves, I can form no conjecture. But I am inclined to think it possible that the man was betrayed somehow to the authorities and is in prison or has been executed. We must assume, however, that he is alive and will return and must comport ourselves accordingly.

"Now I tell you what I mean to do. In such a hoard of gems a few of medium size could never be missed, even if missed, their abstraction could never be proved. I'm going to select the best of the medium-sized emeralds, topazes, rubies and sapphires; enough to fill the leather amulet-bags Chryseros gave us. All slaves wear amulet-bags, if they can get them; ours are old, worn and soiled and will make unsurpassable hiding places for as many gems as they will hold. I'll take out the amulets and sew them into the hems of our tunics, at the corners. I'll fill the bags as full of gems as is possible without making them look unusually plump. Then, if we reach Aquileia, we shall have a source

of cash enough to last us years; for I can sell the jewels one at a time at high prices."

"Are you sure that the stones are worth all that care?" I cavilled. "May you not be mistaken as to their value or even as to their genuineness?"

"Not I," Agathemer bragged. "I am one of the foremost gem experts alive. Your uncle, as you know, held it a wicked waste of money for a sickly bachelor to buy gems; but he was a natural-born gem fancier. He knew every famous jewel in Rome: every one of the Imperial regalia, every one ever worn by anyone at any festival or entertainment, every one in every fancier's collection of jewels. From him I learned all I know: I myself possess the faculties to profit by my training. I know more of gems than most, I tell you!"

I agreed, and, during the next few days, he selected the stones he judged most valuable, enough to fill the hollow of one of my hands and as much for him, and sewed the two batches up in our emptied amulet-bags. The amulets, which were two Egyptian scarabs and two Babylonian seals, very crude in workmanship and of the meanest glazed pottery, he sewed into the corners of our tunics.

Soon after this came the first thaw of the spring; a mild sunny day cleared every bough of every tree of the last vestiges of clinging snow or ice. Then we had two days of warm rain, sometimes a drizzle, sometimes a downpour. Then, on the fourth day, the sky was clear again and the sunshine strong.

As usual after my morning duties, I went in to take a look at our insensible hostess. She lay, as she had mostly lain all winter, breathing almost imperceptibly, her eyes closed. As I bent over her, her eyes opened.

She sat up, wide-eyed, startled, the picture of amazement and it came over me that she was no peasant woman, but a lady.

"Who are you?" she demanded, supporting herself on one elbow. "I do not know you; what are you doing here?"

"I have been helping to nurse you," I said. "You have

been ill a long time and have needed much care. Lie down; you will hinder your recovery if you exert yourself too soon."

She lay back, but propped herself up on her pillows, and in no weak voice insisted on knowing who I was.

At that instant Agathemer entered. He, far more diplomatic than I, took charge of the situation. The woman, instead of losing consciousness again at once, as I expected, appeared possessed of much more strength than anyone would have anticipated and asked searching questions.

Agathemer, tactfully but without any attempt at beating about the bush, told her the whole truth, as to her illness, our finding her alone with the two children, our care of her, and the length of our stay. He said afterwards that he hoped the shock would cure her.

"Am I to understand you to say," she asked, "that I have been in this bed since the middle of the autumn and that it is now almost spring?"

"Just that," said Agathemer simply.

"And that you two men have been, practically, in possession of this entire place all that time?"

"That is true also," I said.

Agathemer and I looked at each other. We had used our one pair of scissors mutually and our hair and beards were not shaggy or bushy. But we were a rough, rather fierce-looking, pair.

"This," she said, "is terrible, terrible! Where are my daughters?"

"Playing about out in the sunshine," I said. "Plump and well-fed, and healthy and cheerful."

"This," she repeated, "is terrible, terrible! May I not see them, may I not speak to them, will you not bring them to me?"

"Indeed we will," I said and motioned to Agathemer. While he was gone the woman and I regarded each other without speaking. When Agathemer returned with the children I said:

"We will leave you to talk to your daughters alone. When you wish us to return send one of the children for us."

The joy of the two at the sight of their mother, sensible and able to recognize them, was pathetic. Sobbing and laughing, they flung themselves on the bed and embraced her, kissing her and she kissing each.

We went out and set to chopping and riving wood.

Before very long Secunda came out and said her mother wanted to speak to me. Leaving Agathemer plying his maul I went in.

The woman was now well propped up against a heap of pillows. She told the children to run off and play till she sent for them. Then she motioned me to seat myself on the chest. I did so.

She regarded me fixedly, as she had while Agathemer had gone for the children. When she spoke she asked:

"What god do you worship?"

I was amazed at this unusual and unexpected question and hesitated a moment before I answered:

"Mercury, chiefly. Of course, Jupiter and Juno; Dionysus, Apollo, Minerva. But most of all Mercury."

She sighed.

"I had expected a very different answer," she said. "But, whatever god or gods you worship, you are a good man and your servant is a good man. I am amazed. My children were truthful till I fell ill. I am sure they could not have changed in one winter. In any case Secunda's precocity and Prima's vacuity seem equally incapable of any deception. What they tell me is all but incredible, yet I believe it. You two men have acted to me and mine as if you had been my blood kin. If you two had been my own brothers you could have done no more for us. I shall always be grateful. What are your names?"

Agathemer and I had agreed to use the names Sabinus Felix and Bruttius Asper. These names, common enough in Sabinum, we, in fact, had given at the farms where Agathemer's flageolet-playing won us entertainment in the autumn. I gave them now. I added:

"It seems best to me that you should not ask either whence we came or whither we are bound."

"I understand," she said.

"And now," said I, "since you have our names, tell us how we should address the mother of Prima and Secunda."

"My name," she said, "is Nona.* My mother had a larger family than I am ever likely to be blest with."

Nona recovered with marvellous rapidity. The weather continued fair and warm, with no strong winds, only steady, gentle breezes. This aided her, as it dried out the hut. She slept well at night, she said, and heavily in the afternoons. When awake she ate heartily and was almost alert. She questioned me again and again as to the condition in which we had found the place. I told her the exact truth, except as to finding the hoards of coins and jewels, to the smallest detail. I also told her of our stewardship and of our having killed and eaten a brace of ewes and eight goats. She approved.

I asked her about the children's tale of the slaves running away.

She sighed.

"I should have trusted any one of the seven," she said. "I believed that any one of them would have been faithful. I suppose almost all slaves are alike, after all. Hermes died about midsummer. He was the oldest of them and the best. I suppose that, in past winters, he had kept the others to their duty. But then, I was never ill before. Without Hermes to lead them, without me to order them, I suppose what they did was natural."

I told her of the great cold and abundant snow of the winter. She questioned me and said:

"Evidently you have had more cold and snow in one winter than I have had in ten."

On the third day after her revival she was able to get out of bed and, leaning heavily on me, to reach the door of the hut. There she sat basking in the sun, Secunda on one side of her, Prima on the other, Hylactor at her feet.

Hylactor had proved himself a perfect watchdog that

* Ninth.

winter. We had never allowed him to sleep in the hut, as he would have done if permitted, and as he tried to do at first. Agathemer had fashioned him a tiny shelter and into it he crawled nightly. Out of it, also, he dashed, if any sound or scent roused him. Tracks of wolves were frequent in the snow out in the forest, and not a few approached our clearing. But we lost not one sheep or goat to any wolf. Hylactor frightened off most and killed three, a medium-sized female and two full-grown young males, at the acme of their fighting powers. We rated Hylactor a paragon among dogs.

The warm weather held on, though unseasonable so early in the year. Nona recovered so rapidly that she was able to visit each of the outbuildings. Just when she was well enough to walk alone and firmly came a sharp spell of cold as unseasonable as had been the heat. It began about noon one clear day, with a high wind. By sunset everything was frozen.

Nona said:

"You two have had more than your share of sleeping on the earth floor by the fire. My bed will hold me and my girls for a few nights. You two take their bed. It will be cold on the floor tonight."

That night, therefore, Agathemer and I enjoyed a sound night's sleep in a deep, soft bed. It was our first night in a Gallic bed, and we liked it. Since our crawl through the drain we had slept abed but four times, at farms in the Umbrian mountains. This was best of all. And we had a succession of nights of it, for the cold held on and, even when it abated, Nona insisted on our continuing to sleep so.

During the cold she mixed a batch of bread, and Agathemer baked it. She had praised his cookery, especially his savory messes of steamed barley, flavored with cheese, raisins and what not. But when the cold snap came after the thaws she suggested that we grind some wheat and she make bread. We acceded with alacrity. The bread tasted unbelievably good.

As soon as the weather was again warm it was plain that

spring was coming in earnest. Nona stood out of doors after sunset, went out again after dark, staring up at the sky.

Next morning, while the children were at play, she said to me:

"Felix, you and Asper must leave this place at once and be on your way. My husband will return soon. He may return any day now. He is a terrible man. He will come with too many men for you to resist and he will not ask any questions until after he has killed you both. I know him. If I could be sure of telling him before he saw you what manner of men you are and how deeply I am in your debt he would repay you lavishly, for he is liberal and generous. But, being what he is, if he finds you here, you will be dead before I can explain. You must go. Prepare to set off at dawn tomorrow."

I told Agathemer and he agreed with me that we had best do as Nona said. She was, as she averred, well enough to care for herself and the children. But we lingered next day. By dusk she was frantic, begging, imploring us to depart at dawn. I feared a recurrence of her illness and gave her my promise.

We set off, actually, not at dawn, but about an hour after sunrise, the broad brims of our travelling hats flapping in the wind, our cloaks close about us, our wallets slung over our shoulders, our staffs in our hands. At the hut door Nona, Prima and Secunda bade us farewell, Nona thanking and blessing us. Hylactor was for following us: we had to order him back, for he paid more attention to us than to Nona.

With a last backward glance at the edge of the clearing we plunged into the forest by the track leading northward.

We had not gone a hundred paces when I thought I heard a scream and stopped. Agathemer declared he had heard nothing. But, listening, we did hear twigs snapping and Hylactor bounded into sight. He did not fawn on us, but seized my cloak in his teeth and tugged, growling and snarling.

"That dog," said Agathemer, "is asking for help. He knows what is too much for him to fight."

We threw off our shoes, wallets and cloaks, tucked up our tunics and, staffs in one hand and sheathless knives in the other, barefoot, raced back along the track after the guiding dog.

From that entrance of the clearing the outbuildings hid the hut from us. When our rush brought us in sight of the hut door we were not six paces from it and just in time to see Hylactor spring on and bear to the earth a man who stood before it. Leaving him to Hylactor we dashed inside, urged by indubitable shrieks.

In the dim interior we made out each child struggling with a man and Nona with two. Before they could turn our knives had slaughtered the children's assailants. One of the survivors Agathemer cracked over the head with his staff. I stabbed the other. Whereupon Agathemer cut the throat of the man he had downed, and dashing outside, finished the man Hylactor was worrying. Quicker than it takes to tell it the five were dead.

Nona had fainted, as we rescued her. But Agathemer revived her with a dash of cold water in her face and some strong wine poured between her lips. We laid her on her bed and told the children to watch her. Then we dragged out the corpses, laid them in a row and considered them. All five were pattern ruffians; black-haired, burly, brutal and fierce. We had had amazing luck to dispose of them so easily. Five lucky flukes, Agathemer called it, and we without a scratch.

One by one we picked them up and carried them off, down the slope, to a soft bit of soil among some beeches. There we laid them in a row. On them we found a few silver coins, five daggers, five knives, five amulet-bags, nothing else. Their tunics and cloaks were old and of poor material.

Back to the hut we went and found Nona revived and at the door.

"Begone!" she said. "Flee! Hasten! That man was

my husband's bitterest enemy. He was intent on revenge. But he could never have found this place save by tracking my husband and conjecturing his destination. My husband must have camped last night less than a day's journey from here. He will be here today, he may be here any moment. Save yourselves. Begone!"

Agathemer and I looked at each other.

"We shall not set off," I said, "until we have buried the five corpses. I'm not going to be haunted on my way and perhaps for life by any such spooks as the ghosts of those five ruffians. We shall make sure that they are safely buried."

Agathemer agreed with me and we set about the task. During the winter we had found mattocks, pickaxes, hoes, spades and shovels hid in the most unlikely places, each by itself, and had hafted them; with these we dug a big pit and in it laid the five corpses, and buried them too deep for any wolf, badger or other creature to be at all likely to smell them and dig them out or dig down to them.

When the men were buried it was past noon. We went back to the hut, drank a second draught of the strongest and sweetest wine and drank it unmixed, as we had drunk our first before we set about carrying the corpses into the forest. Nona renewed her adjurations to begone.

But neither I nor Agathemer would listen to her. I said I was far too tired to travel until after a night's sleep and that after having saved her and her daughters, it was no more than fair that she should stand watch over us while we slept all the afternoon: she could easily watch at the hut door and explain matters to her terrible husband if he came and were as terrible as she averred.

We retrieved our wallets, cloaks and shoes, threw them down in a corner of the hut, ate some bread with plenty of milk to wash it down, and went to sleep in the children's bed, as we had slept the night before. We woke before sunset, did what was needful about the place, ate a hearty dinner of bread, bacon, olives, raisins and wine and at once went to bed for the night. After dark Nona ceased adjuring us

to begone; she said that, if her husband came, she would hear him at the hut door and make him aware of the facts in time to prevent any trouble. We slept till sunrise.

Then Nona declared that she and the children could milk the animals. We agreed with her, for they had little milk by then. We ate a hearty breakfast and set off.

CHAPTER XV

THE HUNT

THAT day we met no one and made a long march northwestwards along the flank of the mountain, camping at dusk by a spring. There we rehearsed our rescue of Nona and marvelled at the ease with which we had disposed of five burly ruffians. Agathemer agreed with me that it had been mostly the effect of complete surprise. But he took a good deal of the credit to himself. He reminded me how he had practiced me, ever since we began our flight, at the art of fighting with knives, at knife attack in general. In particular he had drilled me, as well as he could without a corpse or dummy to practice on, at the favorite stroke of professional murderers, the stab under the left shoulder-blade, the point of the knife or dagger directed a little upward so as to reach the heart. By this stroke I had killed both my victims, and he one of his. I acknowledged his claims, but was inclined to thank the gods for special aid and favor. We discussed that amazingly lucky fight until too sleepy to talk any more.

Next day we met some charcoal burners, who were both friendly and unsuspicious and who gave us intelligible directions for making our way towards Sarsina. The second night we again camped in the woods; the third we spent at a farmhouse, thanks to Agathemer's flageolet.

The farmer, whose name was Cæsus, told a grewsome tale of the horrors of the plague and of the death of almost all his slaves. He was gloomy about his future, as he, his two

sons, and their surviving slave were too few to work his farm. He seemed to regard us as fugitives from justice and as men whom it was his duty to help and protect. As the season was too early for comfortable travelling along byways or for safety from suspicion along highways, and as he welcomed us, we spent a month with him, well fed, well lodged and rather enjoying the hard farm work and the outdoor life, though we spent also much time under-cover, working at what could be done under shelter during heavy rains.

After he had come to feel at ease with us, our host, one day when we three were alone, asked:

"Are you some of the King of the Highwaymen's men?"

On our disclaiming any connection with the King of the Highwaymen, or any knowledge of such a character, he sighed and said:

"Oh, well! Of course, if you were, you would deny it, anyhow. You may be or you may not be. Anyhow, if you are, tell him I treated you well and shall always do my best for any man I take for one of his men.

"You don't look like his kind nor act like any I ever was sure of, but he has all sorts. I thought it best to make sure. It is best to stand well with him. He passes somewhere near here every spring or early summer on his way north and again in the autumn on his way south."

We left this bourne only on the solstice, the tenth day before the Kalends of July, and trudged comfortably to Sarsina, where we put up at the inn, frequented by foot-farers like us. So also at Cæsena and Faventia. There we agreed that we had had enough of the highway, as we might encounter some Imperial spies of the regular secret service department, and not a few of these spies might know me by sight in any disguise. So we struck off due north through the almost level open country, intending to keep on northward until we came to the Spina and to follow that to the Po. As Agathemer said, if we could not find ferrymen by day we could steal a skiff by night.

Not far north of Faventia, after an easy-going day's march under a mild spring sky, we came, just before sunset, to a

forest of considerable extent. As we could not conjecture whether to turn east or west, we camped at its edge and slept soundly, comfortable in our cloaks, for the night was warm and still.

Next morning the weather was so charming that we were tempted to plunge into the forest and cross it as nearly due north as we could guide ourselves by the sun. Since we reached the edge of the forest we had seen no human-being near enough for us to ask in which direction we had best try to go round it. We plunged into it and in it we wasted the entire day.

The country is very flat between Faventia and the Spina. I do not believe that in any part of that forest the surface of the soil was four yards higher than in any other part. And it was marshy, all quagmires and sloughs, with narrow, sinuous ribbons, as it were, of fairly dry land between them. We were hopelessly involved among its morasses before we realized our plight and, after we did realize it, we seemed to make little progress. We agreed that it would be folly to try to regain our camp: we held to our purpose and tried to advance northwards. But we doubled right and left, had to retrace our steps often and could form no idea how far we had penetrated.

There was an astonishing abundance of game in that forest: hares everywhere; does with fawns, young does, and not a few stags; wild boars, which fled, grunting, out of their wallows as we approached; foxes of which we three times glimpsed one at a distance; and we came on indubitable wolf tracks. We had plenty of food and ate some at noon, for we were tired. Then we spent the day threading the mazes of that swampy forest. We were careful not to get bogged and we kept our tunics and cloaks dry, though we were mired to the knees. But our very care delayed us. The day was breezy and mild but not really warm, so that we did not suffer from the heat. But by nightfall we were exhausted and had no idea how far we had advanced northward. Just at dusk we came to reasonably firm going and walked due

north about a furlong. There, as the twilight deepened, we encountered another stretch of ooze. We retreated from it a dozen paces and camped under some swamp-maples on comfortably dry ground. We ate about half of our food, bread, olives, and dried figs; and while eating dried and warmed our feet and shanks at a generous fire of fallen boughs, which Agathemer, who was clever with flint and steel, had made quickly. When our feet felt as if they really belonged to us, we wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and slept soundly.

We slept, indeed, so soundly, that it was broad day when we waked. And we waked to hear the wood ringing with the barking and baying of dogs and with the cries of hunters and beaters. Instantly we realized that we were in danger. For a hunt of such size as was approaching us must have been gotten up by a coterie of wealthy land-owners; and such magnates, if they caught sight of us, would at once suspect us of being runaway slaves. It had been easy enough to pass ourselves off for farmerly cattle-buyers in the Umbrian Mountains. But, habited as we were, camped in the depths of a thick, swampy forest, we were sure to be suspected of being runaway slaves by anyone who encountered us; and such gentry as organize big hunts with swarms of beaters are always prone to suspect any footfarers of being runaway slaves.

We hastily girded ourselves for flight, meanwhile reminding each other of the story we had planned to tell if caught.

At first we seemed to have luck. We turned westwards away from the beaters and found and passed the upper end of the morass which had stopped us the night before. From there the going was good, through open underbrush, beneath big beeches and chestnuts, over firm and gently rolling ground. Stopping and listening we tried to judge by the sounds the location of the line of beaters. We seemed to have a chance of getting beyond its western end. We set off again; just as we started on nine deer dashed past us, a big stag, two young stags and six does.

Then we did run, for we knew it was our last chance and, indeed, but little further, a young wolf raced down a ferny glade, vanishing into some alders on the further side of the glade. I nearly trod on a fleeing hare. The beaters could not be far off.

Yet, for a bit, we seemed to be gaining on them, although we were quartering their front on a long slant. The third time we stopped to pant and listen we thought that our next dash would carry us where we might crouch in the first thicket and let their line sweep past us.

But, some fifty yards or so beyond, when we came to the dancing red feathers on the cord and thought we would be safe in a few breaths, there rose at us, from behind the feathered cord, three stocky men, armed with broad-bladed hunting-spears, who yelled at us:

"Halt! Stand! Surrender!"

We recoiled from them, amazed, threw away our wallets, threw off our cloaks, and bolted, incredulous; and as we ran, we heard them yelling:

"Here! Here! Here they are! We see them! This way, all of you! We've got them! Here they are!"

No bogs, no sloughs turned us or delayed us. The going was good, over firm footing, through light underwoods, among wide-set, big trees. For our lives we ran. There seemed a very slender chance of our crossing the whole length of the line of beaters and escaping on the other side, but that slender chance seemed our only chance. We ran fit to burst our hearts.

And the hunt was plainly converging on us. The noises of the beaters drew nearer. We seemed in a swarm of fleeing hares: more deer and more deer passed us, this time, I thought, does with young fawns. We caught a glimpse of another wolf, of two foxes. And, in a moist hollow, we barely avoided a nasty rush of eight panic-stricken, grunting wild swine.

We did run across the entire line of beaters, but little good it did us. Again we saw before us the feathered cord, the scarlet plumes dancing in the sun. At it we ran, sure

of safety if we passed it unseen and penetrated even ten yards beyond it into the underbrush. But we were again disappointed.

This time only two huntsmen rose at us, but they, too, flourished hunting spears with gleaming points, as big as spades. They too yelled at us and yelled to their fellows:

"Halt! You are caught! Hands up! Give yourselves up!"

And:

"There they go! Both of them! Come on! Here they are!"

Off we went again, slanting back across the approaching line of dogs and beaters, now closer together as they drew on towards the nets, and already appallingly close to us. Again we crossed the whole line, now much shorter. But this time we ran, not against part of the long stretch of feathered cord, but against the outer yard-high net. Of course this was well guarded and again we were yelled at and turned back.

Doubling back, now steaming, panting, gasping, with knees trembling under us, we reached the net on the other side.

Turned again, we found the beaters so near us and so close together, that we ran away from them rather than across their line. We ran, in fact, in a sort of mob of hares, foxes, boars, deer and even wolves, for some of each were in sight every moment.

So running we came where we could see the line of nets, now of six-foot, heavy-meshed nets, on either side of us. We made a last, desperate dash at one of the nets, I hoping to leap it or vault it or clamber over it and escape, after all. But six keepers, all with broad-bladed hunting spears, rose at us beyond it, rose with triumphant yells:

"We've got you now! We've got you now!"

From them we shied off and ran, half staggering with exhaustion and despair, between the converging lines of nets, ran in a veritable press of terrified game of all sorts, ran madly, since we heard now, not the barking and whine of dogs straining at their leashes, but the exultant yelping, barking

and baying of great packs of dogs unleashed behind their game.

Of course, although no single dog, however infuriated, would ever attack me in daylight, when it could see my face, yet I could do nothing whatever to protect myself, and far less Agathemer, against the massed onset of more than a hundred maddened hunting dogs, each bigger than a full-grown wolf.

So running, staggering, stumbling, at the end of our strength, we found ourselves running into the battue-pocket at the meeting of the two long converging lines of nets. Anything would be better than that. We tried to double back and were met by a dozen big dogs, some Gallic dogs of the breed of Tolosa, spotted black and white, others mouse-colored Molossians. To escape them we dodged apart, each ran for a tree, each jumped, each caught the lowest limb of a thick-foliaged maple, the two not much over five yards apart. So thick were their leaves that I could hardly make out Agathemer in his tree. The two maples were close to the beginning of the pocket net. From my perch I could see plainly how cunningly the pocket had been set.

It was of strong, close-meshed nets fully three yards high stretched on sturdy forked stakes and well guyed back outside to pegs like tent-pegs. These pocketing nets were set along the tops of the two banks of a gully about twenty yards wide, sloping sharply downward from its top near our trees and with sides three or four yards high and steep. Once in this gully, between the pocketing nets along the upper edge of its sides, no boar could scramble out, the lower meshes of the pocketing nets were too fine for any hare to squeeze through; no doe, no stag even, could leap such nets at the top of such banks.

I could just spy a part of the heaviest net across the gully at the end of the pocket. It seemed a large meshed net of rope thicker than my knee, with the large meshes filled in with smaller meshes of rope the size of my wrist.

Hardly was I safe in the crotch of my tree when the last of the game swept by below us, the dogs hot behind them, up

came the press of beaters, and, from each side, in rushed the hunters, a score of handsome nobles and gentry, habited in green tunics, wearing small, green, round-crowned, narrow-brimmed hunting hats and green boots up to just below their knees. Each carried a heavy shafted hunting spear, tipped with a huge triangular gleaming head, pointed like a needle, edged like a razor, broad as a spade at its flare.

Even in my terror and exhaustion I could not but feel a certain pleasure in the beauty of the scene, a sort of thrill at its strangeness. I had participated in such hunts in Bruttium and Sabinum, but never as hunted game.

The sun was not yet half way up the heavens, the dew had not yet dried from the leaves, owing to the very late spring the freshness of springtime had not yet passed into the fullness of early summer. Through the tender green of the young leafage, starry with drops of moisture, the sunshine shot long shafts of golden light. Under the beautiful canopy of blue sky and golden green foliage was the amazing turmoil of the hunt.

More than a hundred large animals, pigs, fawns, sows, does, boars and stags had fled before the beaters and were now jammed pellmell in the gully, for the end-net held. There they frantically jostled each other and the half dozen wolves caught among them which, indeed, snapped, slashed and tore at everything within reach, but, cowed themselves, had no effect whatever on the maddened victims which all but trod them under and actually trampled on foxes and on the swarm of squeaking, helpless hares.

Upon this mass of terrified flesh the two hundred dogs flung themselves, through the nets the huntsmen stabbed at the nearest victims, behind the dogs the shouting hunters advanced to spear their game, the battue was on and I watched it till the last animal was flat. The few which, frenzied, doubled back through the dogs and hunters were met and killed by the beaters. Not one escaped.

As the battue ended up came the rush of beaters and our trees were soon surrounded by a crowd of eager, exultant, infuriated beaters and huntsmen.

Up the trees young beaters swarmed and we were plucked down, thumped, whacked, punched, kicked and manacled, our tunics torn off, ourselves mishandled till we streamed blood, all amid abuse, threats, epithets, execrations and curses.

We stood, half fainting, utterly dazed, supported by the two or three captors who held each of us, but for whose clutches we should have collapsed on the earth.

We expected to be torn limb from limb, yet could not conjecture why we were the objects of such infuriated animosity. A beater clutching either elbow, a hand clutching my neck from behind, my knees knocking together, naked, bruised, bloody, gasping, fainting, I, like Agathemer, was haled a few paces to one corner of the pocket net. There we were held till the gentlemen came up out of the gully.

Up they came, a score of handsome young fellows, mostly each with his hat in his hand and mopping his forehead.

"Why!" the foremost of them cried. "These are not the men! These are not the men at all! They are not in the least like them!"

"Not in the least like Lupercus and Rufinus, certainly," another added.

"What a pack of asses you are!" cried a third, "to mishandle two strangers. Couldn't you look at them before you mauled them?"

"We all took them for Rufinus and Lupercus," the head huntsman rejoined. "Certainly they are desperate characters and runaways. Look at their backs."

They turned us round, to display the marks of scourging still plain on us both.

"They've both been branded," said a gentleman's voice.

"Pooh!" cried another, "that proves nothing. They may have been scourged and branded by former masters, and manumitted since. I'll have no stranger ill-treated on my land until he has had a chance to explain himself."

While he was speaking my guards turned me round again and took their hands off me.

Our champion was a tall, powerful, plump and florid young

man, with very curly golden hair, very light blue eyes, and the merest trace of downy, curly yellow beard. He was very handsome, with small delicate nose and mouth, a round chin and the most beautiful ears I ever saw on any man. He wore senators' boots and a tunic of pure silk, dyed a very brilliant green and embroidered all over with a flowering vine in a darker, glossier green.

"What are your names?" asked the elder man who had noticed our brand-marks. He was swarthy and probably over thirty.

I gave him the name of Felix and Agathemer that of Asper, as we had agreed, neither of us thinking it advisable to claim to be free Romans by prefixing, "Sabinus" and "Bruttius."

"Shut up, Marcus," our champion ordered, "can't you see that these poor fellows are in no condition to answer any questions? We'll interrogate them after they have bathed, eaten and slept."

"Here, Trogus," he called to one of the chief-huntsman's assistants, "take charge of these two fellows. Treat them well; if they report any incivility or omission on your part I'll make you regret it. When they are bathed and fed, let them sleep all they want to.

"And, here, Umbro" (this to the head-huntsman), "see that their effects are found and restored to them."

He turned to us.

"Did you have wallets?" he asked.

We nodded, too shaken to speak.

"Umbro," he said, "scour the wood. Have their shoes, their cloaks and especially their wallets found and brought to me. And make sure that nothing is taken from those wallets, that they are handed to their owners as they were found. If they find anything missing, I'll make you and your men smart. Be prompt! Be lively. Get those wallets and cloaks and shoes."

While he gave these orders, some beaters brought us our torn tunics; which, even so, were better than no clothing at all. We put them on.

Then we were led off to the edge of a forest, bestowed in a light Gallic gig, drawn by one tall roan mule only, and in it, the driver sitting at our feet, sideways, on one shaft, his legs hanging down, we were driven off through a beautiful gently rolling country, clothed with the superabundant crops, vines and orchards of the lower Po Valley, all bathed in brilliant spring sunshine, to a magnificent villa, most opulently provided with white-walled, neat outbuildings, all roofed with red tiles. In one of these, apparently the house of the farm-overseer, we were bathed, clothed with fresh tunics, far better than our own, lavishly fed and led to rest in tiny white-washed rooms, very plain, but clean and airy, where we went to sleep on corded cots provided with very thin grass-stuffed mattresses.

When we woke each found his wallet beside his cot, set on his neatly folded cloak; with our old worn shoes, well cleaned, on the floor by the folded cloaks.

Later we were led before our host and champion, who turned out to be Tarrutenus Spinellus; in no wise, it seemed, affected by the downfall of his great kinsman. He questioned us and Agathemer told the story we had agreed on: that we had been slaves of Numerius Vedius of Aquileia, who had been kind to both of us and had made him overseer and me accountant of his vegetable farms on the sandy islets offshore along the coast of the Adriatic by Aquileia. There we had lived contentedly till we had been captured by raiding Liburnian pirates from the Dalmatian islands. They had sold us at Ancona, where we had been horribly mistreated by a cruel and savage master, who had branded and scourged us for imaginary delinquencies.

From him we had run away, intent on making our way back to Aquileia and to our rightful owner.

"This all sounds plausible," said Tarrutenus, "and I believe you, and it falls out well. For my cousin, Cornelius Vindex, will leave tomorrow or next day for Aquileia and you can travel in his company all the way."

We were well fed and lodged while at Villa Spinella. While there we learned that Lupercus and Rufinus, the two

escaped malefactors for whom we had been mistaken by the huntsmen and beaters, had been runaway slaves, long uncatchable and lurking in swamps and forests, who had lately tried to rob at night the store-house of a farmstead: and who, when the farmer rushed out to defend his property, had murdered him and even thereafter, in mere wantonness, had also murdered two of his slaves, his wife and a young daughter. This horrible crime had roused the whole countryside to hunt them down and the great battue in which we had been involved had been organized at a time of the year most unusual and ruinous to the increase of deer-herds, precisely in order to snare the outlaws along with the game. They had not been caught and we had.

After two nights' good sleep, and a day's rest, with excellent and abundant meals, we set off at dawn in Cornelius' convoy, our precious amulet-bags untouched; our wallets just as we had flung them down in the forest, not a coin missing; and we were clothed in new good tunics, our bruises pretty well healed up or healing nicely, ourselves well content with our escape, but meditating a second escape, this time from Cornelius.

For we had no stomach for the road to Aquileia, if in such company that we must present ourselves before Vedius as claiming to be slaves of his.

We escaped easily enough, just after crossing the Po, by sneaking off in the darkness from a villa where Cornelius stopped overnight with a friend. Without any difficulty we recrossed the Po, not far below Hostilia, and from there made for Parma.

For we agreed that, after our story to Tarrutenus, with Cornelius Vindex in Aquileia, Aquileia would be no fit bourne for us. So we decided, after all, to risk the highway from Parma to Dertona and from there make our way across the Ligurian Mountains to Vada Sabatia and from there along the highway to Marseilles, where we should be able to hide in the slums among the mixture of all races in that lively city; and where Agathemer was sure he could turn gems into cash without danger or suspicion.

All went well with us till we reached Placentia. There we put up at an inn. As we were leaving the town next morning, when we were about half way from the inn to the Clastidian Gate, Agathemer gripped my arm and motioned me up a side street. We walked with every indication of leisurely indifference until we had taken several turns and were alone in a narrow street. Then he told me that we had barely missed coming face to face with Gratillus himself.

This barely missed encounter with one of the most dreaded of the Emperor's spies, a man who knew me perfectly and who had always disliked me, so terrified both of us that we left Placentia by the Nuran Gate and made our way southwestward into the Apennines.

Once in the mountains we avoided every good road we saw and kept to bad byways, until we were completely lost.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CAVE

THE late spring or early summer weather was hot and clear. We had been pressing on feverishly and were heated, tired and sleepy, when, while following a faint track through dense woods, we took a wrong turn and soon found that we had utterly lost our way. The sunlight was intensely brilliant and the windless air sweltering. Stumbling over rocks and through bushes was exhausting. We came upon a little spring and quenched our thirst. Standing by it and staring about we noticed what looked like an opening in an inconspicuous vine-clad cliff. It was, in fact, the entrance to a spacious and, apparently, extensive cave.

The outer opening was about the size of an ordinary door. Though it was well masked by beeches above and cornel bushes below, such was the position of the sun and so intense was the flood of light it poured down from the cloudless sky, that the inside of the cave, for some little distance, was

faintly discernible in the glimmer which penetrated there. After our eyes had become accustomed to the darkness we could make out fairly well the shape and proportions of the first considerable grotto.

From the outer opening a passage about a yard wide and two yards high extended straight into the cliff for about four yards. There it bent sharply to the right in an elbow. This offset extended three or four yards and then bent to the left in a similar elbow, opening into a cavern more than fifteen yards wide, twice as long or longer, and with a roof of dim white pendants like alabaster, no part of which was less than five yards from the conveniently level, rather damp floor, while some parts of it were lofty.

The two elbows in the entrance passage made it impossible to see into this cavern from anywhere out in the woods, and impossible to see out from anywhere inside it. Yet, as I said, so brilliant was the sunlight and so favorable the position of the sun at the moment of our entrance that, after the outer dazzle had faded from inside our eyes, we could make out the form and size of this rocky hall.

To the right of the opening where the outer passage expanded, around a jutting shoulder of rock, we found a recess about three yards across and nearly as deep, in which we felt and smelt wood-ashes and charred, half-burnt wood. We groped among the damp charcoal, convincing ourselves that many good-sized fires had been made there, but none recently. We stood back and regarded this recess, which was so placed that no gleam from any fire, however large, kindled in it, could ever show outside the cave. Investigating the recess yet again Agathemer looked up and pointed. Above me, I saw sky. The recess was a natural fire-place with a natural chimney from it, opening at a considerable height above.

To the right of the fire-place recess, round another smaller shoulder of rock, was a perfectly vertical wall of smooth stone terminating just above our reach at an opening three yards wide or more. The top of the wall of rock at the bottom of the opening was almost as straight as a door-sill.

At first we could descry in the walls of the cavern no other

openings than the entrance, the chimney and this opening above our reach, unless one boosted the other up. From under it we went all round the cave past the fire-place and the entrance. The floor was all damp or moist, no place fit for us to lie down to sleep and we felt along the wall opposite the fire-place, where the light was too dim to see at all. After feeling for some yards we emerged or came round into a less dusky space, where we could see to some extent and so on along the back wall of the cave opposite the entrance, later groping along the wall, when the light failed.

Some forty to forty-five yards from the entrance, at the far end of this extensive grotto, we came upon a passage, two or three yards wide and about as high, leading further back into the bowels of the mountain. We groped into it a few steps, but it sloped sharply downward and was wet, so we retreated out of it, it being also pitch dark.

Returning along the other side of the cavern towards the fire-place we came upon a narrow opening, less than a yard wide and not much over a yard high. It led into a passage which sloped upwards and was free from moisture. Agathemer was for exploring it. I remonstrated. He insisted. After some expostulation I bade him stand at the opening, which was out of sight of the gleam of daylight at the entrance, being behind a big shoulder of rock further in than the fire-place. While he stood as I told him I went out towards the middle of the cavern floor till I could see the fire-place, though very dimly, and the entrance, quite clearly, by the mellow glow at it from the outer sunshine reflected along the walls of the twice bent entrance-passage.

When I had reached a position from which I could certainly see the entrance and from which, as Agathemer told me, I could be seen by him, I told him I would stay there while he explored the little passage into the side of the cavern. I adjured him to be cautious and not venture himself recklessly in the pitch dark. He declared he could feel his way safely some distance and be sure of returning. Then he crawled into the narrow opening.

Before I had waited long enough to grow impatient, I heard him call:

"Why, I can see you!"

The voice came not from the direction of the opening into which he had crawled, but from near the fire-place.

"Where are you?" I called back.

"Over here," said he, "come towards me."

Advancing towards the voice and peering into the dimness, where the light dispersed from the entrance made the darkness of the cavern just a little less dark than blackness, I saw him standing on the sill, as it were, of the opening up in the wall, beyond the fire-place as one approached from the entrance, and above the vertical wall of rock.

He had found a passage just big enough to crawl through leading from the aperture up to this species of gallery-alcove. The passage curved and was not much over twenty yards long. He pulled me up to the gallery and we crawled back together out of the aperture by which he had entered the passage. The whole passage was dry, unlike the floor of the cave.

"I tell you what we ought to do," said Agathemer, "let us go outside and gather armfuls of small leafy boughs and twigs. These we can throw up into that gallery-opening and make a fine bed there where it is dry. Then we can get a good safe sleep, and we need a long sound sleep."

We did as he suggested till we had leaves enough for a good bed. Then we ate, sparingly, for we had not much food in our wallets. After eating we wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and went to sleep; Agathemer with his wallet beside him and his head on his arm, I with my wallet under my head.

I wakened with a hand over my mouth and with Agathemer's voice in my ear saying:

"Keep still! Lie still! Don't move or speak! Lie still!"

He spoke in a tense whisper, so low that I could hardly understand him with his mouth against my ear, so full of terror that the tone of it startled me wide awake.

My first impression was of a glaring orange light on the roof of the cavern and a diffused reflection of it or from it on the roof of our gallery-alcove.

"Keep your head down!" Agathemer whispered. "If you turn over, turn over quietly."

I did turn over, very slowly, a muscle at a time and with great precautions to avoid rustling the leaves or twigs of the bed on which we lay.

As soon as I turned over I perceived that a good, big fire must be burning on the fire-place and that the light on the cavern roof was the direct glare from that, while the subdued glow on the roof of our alcove was the light reflected from the farther wall of the cavern or from its roof.

As our alcove was separated from the fire by a jutting pillar of rock, no direct light from the fire fell on its opening; it and we were well in the shadow. So shadowed we could hunch ourselves forward as far as we dared and peer down into the cave.

Its floor was littered with wallets, blankets, staffs and other foot-farers' gear. About it sat groups of men, every one with a sheath-knife or dagger in his belt. I counted forty and there were more out of sight round the shoulder of rock between our alcove and the fire-place.

We smelt flesh roasting or boiling. The squatting groups seemed busy with preparations for a meal.

The men, except one lad like a shepherd, did not look Italian. Some struck me as Spanish, others as Gallic, one or two as runaway slaves of mongrel ancestry. Nearly all of them had the unmistakable carriage and bearing of soldiers, even specifically of soldiers of out-of-the-way garrisons, in the mountains or on frontiers. Yet their behavior was unsoldierly. I judged them discharged campaigners with an admixture of deserters and outlaws. They all had travellers' umbrella hats, and all had thrown them off; their cloaks were coarse and rough, many torn, but none patched, their tunics similar; their boots of Gallic fashion, coming up nearly to the knee, like Sicilian hunting-boots. They were all black-haired and shock-headed, all swarthy, and most of them of

medium height and solidly built. They did not talk loud and they all talked at once, so that we made out little of what was said and nothing informing.

I could not but remark that, although the weather was exceedingly hot and the fire seemed large, it made no difference whatever in the feeling of the very slightly damp, gratefully cool and evenly mild air of the cavern.

Presently the food was ready and was distributed: goat's-flesh, roasted or broiled, some sort of coarse bread or quickly-made cakes, wine aplenty, olives and figs. While they ate most of them sat in groups; some stood by twos or threes; a few stood singly. From their looks, attitudes, the direction in which they faced and other indications, we inferred that their chief was seated to the right of the fire, between it and us, with his back to the pillar of rock and just out of sight of us around it. Some appeared to be standing in a half-circle before him, listening to him, or conversing with him. A few of the men ate alone, sitting, standing or walking about.

One of these, munching a while as he strolled back and forth, came and took his stand behind and outside of the respectful half circle, standing facing the fire. When he finished eating and his face quieted as he stood there silent, gazing at something out of our sight, all at once, simultaneously, I gripped Agathemer and he gripped me. The fellow was Caulonius Pelops, two years before secretary to the overseer of my uncle's estate near Consentia in Bruttium. He had run away not long before my uncle's death.

I stared at him, revolving in my mind the difference of the attitude of mind towards runaway slaves of a former master who catches sight of a runaway from his estates and of the same being while pretending himself to be a runaway. I could have laughed out loud at the contrast between the feelings towards Pelops which I felt surge up in me and the feelings I hoped for towards me, say in Tarrutenus Spinellus.

Pelops, of course, knew me perfectly, knew Agathemer as well, would recognize either of us at sight. Therefore, if we were now discovered, we saw lost all that we had thought to gain and thought we had gained by our crawl through

the drain pipe and the other features of our escape up to now. If Pelops set eyes on me, he, at least, would know that I was yet alive, he might tell all the band; if he told them, any one of them, even if not he himself, might inform the authorities and put new life into the search for me, if it had not been abandoned, or revive it if it had; put every spy in Italy on the alert to catch me: or even betray me to the nearest magistrate.

And Pelops had always disliked me and had always envied and hated Agathemer. We were keyed up with anxiety.

Just as we recognized Pelops a tall, red-headed, sandy lout, with a long neck and a prominent gullet-knot, came forward into sight from the direction of the entrance, apparently from beyond the fire. He put up his right hand and called, slowly and clearly:

"Eating time is over: Now we hold council!"

The men speedily assembled in curving rows facing the fire and sat or stood as they pleased, all facing where we inferred that their leader sat, to the right of the fire-place out of our sight round the bulge of the shoulder of rock.

Between them and the fire, just far enough from it for him to be visible to us, a burly shock-headed, black-haired southern Gaul took his stand.

Then we clearly heard a voice, which we inferred must be the leader's, a voice distinct and far-carrying, but a voice amazingly soft, mild and gentle, say:

"Council is called. Let all other men be silent. Caburus is to speak."

The burly Gaul began blusteringly, with a strong southern Gallic accent like a Tolosan:

"It is no use, Maternus, trying to bamboozle us with your everlasting serenity. We decline to be fooled any longer. Somehow, by sorcery or magic, you infused into us the greatest enthusiasm for your crazy project. You've dragged us over the Alps and into these Apennines. On the way we've talked matters over among ourselves. The nearer we get to Rome the crazier our errand seems. We have made fools of

ourselves under your leadership long enough. We go no further.

"We admit that Commodus ought to be killed; we admit that, if he were killed, it would be a good thing for all Gaul and for Spain and Britain, too, and, we suppose, for Italy and all the provinces. We also admit that it would be a fine thing for us if we could kill Commodus, avoid getting killed or caught ourselves, and win the rewards we could properly hope for from the next Emperor, and the glory we'd have at home as successful heroes.

"But, when free from the spell of your eloquence, we see no chance of killing the Emperor and surviving to reap the reward of our prowess: none of surviving: not even any of killing him. You say you have a perfect and infallible plan which you will reveal when the time comes. You may have a plan and it may be infallible and as certain of success as the sun is certain of rising tomorrow and the day after. But we have followed you and your secret plan long enough. We follow no further unless we know what plan we are expected to take part in. We have all agreed to that and we all stick to that."

And the assemblage chorused:

"We have all agreed to that and we all stick to that."

Now, from where we peered down from our hiding-place Maternus was entirely out of sight. We could not see what attitude he took nor what expression his face wore. Yet, by the flickering light of the leaping fire, which flooded the cavern with its ruddy glare, we could plainly see the effect of his personality on the assemblage. Even as their shouts of assent to what Caburus had said still rang through the cave I could see them half fawning, half cringing towards their chief.

Yet his voice, when he spoke, was not harsh or domineering, but, while perfectly audible, as bland and placid as a girl's.

"Please remember," he said, "that a plan such as I have conceived, while it is, if carried out as designed, as certain of success as the swoop of the hawk upon the hare, is certain of success only while it is not only undreamed of by its object

but totally unsuspected by anyone outside of our band. The success of our project depends on no one having any inkling of any such project, far less having an inkling of what kind of a project it is.

"For your sakes and for your sakes only have I kept the details of my plans locked in my own bosom. You are venturing your lives to help me to the realization of my hopes of setting free the world. Your lives must not be risked needlessly. Little will be the risk any of you will run in carrying out my plans, so ingeniously are they conceived. But that smallness of risk can be attained only if the nature of the project is unknown to anyone save myself up to the latest possible moment before putting it into effect. Every day, every hour, which elapses between the giving of my instructions and their execution increases the danger of our betrayal. We must have guides, we must, occasionally, induct into our society new associates. Not one of these can be a danger to us as long as the methods by which we are to effect our purpose is unknown except to me. I propose no loitering in Rome. I mean to arrive at the right spot at the right hour, at the hour of opportunity, to strike and to vanish before anyone save ourselves knows that the blow has been struck. Only thus can we succeed, only thus can we escape. Upon my silence our success depends. Once I speak, every day, every hour makes it more likely that someone will betray to some outsider the nature of our plot or even its details. Then we shall certainly fail and perish."

Thereupon ensued a long wrangle in which Caburus repeated that Maternus had said all that before and Maternus repeated the same argument in other words and brought up other similar arguments. The crowd, while swayed by Maternus, appeared to lean more and more to the opinions of Caburus. It became manifest that they would break away and disperse unless Maternus revealed his intentions. He was, apparently, quick to sense the situation and finally yielded.

"I have three separate plans," he said, "and I mean to prepare to use all three, so that, if the first fails the second may

succeed; if both the first and second fail I may hope to succeed with the third.

"I mean to reach Rome two days before the Festival of Cybele and for all of us to get a sound night's sleep. Then, on the eve of the great day, most of you may wander about the city sight-seeing; Caburus and I and a few with us will buy or hire costumes for the Festival.

"As we have all heard, the wildest license in costumes is permitted on the day of the celebration. Everybody dresses up as extravagantly as possible. More than that it is so customary for jokers to dress up in burlesque of notables that such assumptions of the costumes of officials are merely laughed at and the wearers of them are never arrested or even reprimanded.

"Caburus and I will buy at old-clothing shops or hire from costumers cast off uniforms of the privates of the Prætorian Guard. Two squads of us, all volunteers and approved as boldest, strongest and quickest, will dress up as Prætorians. One will be led by Caburus and I myself shall lead the other.

"Caburus and his men will mingle with the crowd along the line of the morning procession. The procession is so long, its route is so jammed with sight-seeing rabble, the rabble is permitted so close to the line of the procession, so many wonders and marvels form part of the procession, there is so much interest in gazing at them, that it is possible that Caburus may see a chance to achieve our object. I shall leave it to him whether to give whatever signal he may agree on with his men, or to withhold it. If he sees an opportunity, that will mean that, in his judgment, there is a good chance of killing the tyrant and getting away unrecognized. You know how cautious Caburus is: you will run no risk if he does not give the signal and little if he does.

"Now, Caburus, what do you think of this plan?"

Not being able to watch Maternus making his speech, I, while straining my ears to catch his softly uttered words, had kept my eyes on Caburus, had marvelled to see the dogged spirit of opposition and surly disaffection fade out of his

expression, to see interest and excitement take their place.

"I think," he shouted, "that you are a marvel! I don't wonder that you wanted to conceal this plan till the last possible moment. It is so good that I already want to tell it to somebody, just to see his amazement. But we'll keep your secret! And as to your plan, I'll risk it. No Gaul with a drop of sporting blood in his veins would hesitate to embrace the opportunity to try to carry out so ingenious, so promising a plan.

"And you don't need a second plan or third plan. This plan, under my leadership, is certain to succeed."

At this a scrawny, tow-headed, long-armed, long-legged fellow sprang to his feet.

"I don't agree with that at all," he vociferated.

"Just because the first plan pleases Caburus is no reason why we should not hear the other two plans also."

This utterance started a long discussion, from which Agathemer and I learned nothing except that there was much insubordination among the men following Maternus and that the scrawny objector was named Torix.

The upshot of the discussion was a general agreement that Maternus ought to disclose all three plans.

Maternus then resumed:

"The second plan is already known to Cossedo and it need not be known to anyone else, as he alone is concerned and he, if Caburus decides not to make his attempt, will attempt his alone, without any assistance from anyone and without endangering anyone else; in fact without endangering himself. I myself thought of this plan, which is so ingenious that, if it succeeds, no one will ever know how Commodus came to his death; it if fails no one will ever suspect that it was tried at all.

"You have all been wondering how Cossedo came to be with us. Many of you have jeered him; many of you have protested to me. But I know what I am doing. Cossedo can do other things besides walk the tight-rope, juggle five balls at once, and stand on his head on the back of a galloping horse. He is just the right man to carry out my idea, which neither I nor

any other of us could put into effect. As Cossedo approves the plan; as he is to try it alone, no one else need know it."

"Just so," cried the red-headed lout who had heralded the council, coming forward into the fire-light. "I can try it and I may do it. If I do it, Commodus will be a corpse. If I fail, no one will know I have tried. And it is a jewel of a plan."

And he stood on his hands, feet waggling in the air, apparently from mere exuberance of spirits. Standing up again, he threw three flip-flops forward, then two backward, then turned a half a dozen cart wheels, during which gyrations he passed out of our field of view.

Torix sulkily agreed that the second plan remain unknown except to Maternus and Cossedo, the assemblage not supporting him when he pressed for its disclosure. But he was insistent about the third plan.

"The third plan," said Maternus, "is merely the first plan over again, except that I lead instead of Caburus and that we try after dark instead of by day. From all I can hear the opportunity will be even better by torchlight in the gardens about the temple than it will be by day in the jammed streets. I mean to be as cautious as I expect Caburus to be: there is no use making an attempt unless a really promising chance presents itself. If I see an opening I'll kill the monster myself, and I do not expect to need any help from anybody, except a little jostling in the crowd to increase the confusion. As rigged up in Prætorian uniforms we will be laughed at and indulged. Either in the noonday swelter or in the torchlit darkness it ought to be easy to pass from aping, mimicking and burlesquing Prætorians to personating and counterfeiting Prætorians. Once mistaken for real guards we ought to be able to get close to Commodus. Then in the torchlight it should be easy for me to finish him and for you others to escape. I shall not think of escape until the deed is done. Then I'll escape, if I can, but I shall let no thought of escape interfere with my doing what I purpose."

This speech was acclaimed by everyone except Torix. He said:

"All this is most ingenious. But there is in this plan one flaw which no one has noted. I suppose that you, Maternus, evolved this really promising idea from pondering on what Claudius told us. All the hearsay about Rome and its festivals which ever came to the ears of all of us put together is as nothing at all compared with what Claudius told us in two months. Claudius had lived in Rome, Claudius knew every alley in Rome. With Claudius to pilot us we might have hoped to succeed. But Claudius is dead, dead somewhere in the Alps, where he is no use to us. He had seen the Emperor, he knew him by sight. Not one of us does. And, as Claudius told us, at the Festival of Cybele, as at several other religious festivals, the Emperor does not wear his official robes, so that anyone may recognize him, but appears in the garb of a priest of the deity celebrated, as High Priest or Assistant High Priest, or as a dignitary of some other degree, the rank in the hierarchy varying with the diety worshipped.

Now not one of us, who have never set eyes on him, can tell Commodus, in the garb of a priest of Cybele, from any other priest of Cybele. We have no reasonable assurance of recognizing the mark at which we aim. Thus we have only a small chance of success by sunlight or torchlight."

This utterance started another wrangle; the men, apparently, about equally divided as backers of Maternus and of Torix. As I lay listening to this hubbub someone stepped on the calf of my leg, his foot slipped off of it, and he fell on top of me, with a smothered exclamation.

"Who are you?" he demanded, adding some words which I did not catch. It seemed that another man was occupied similarly with Agathemer.

The man who had fallen on me, in the act of scrambling up, yelled out:

"Here are two men lying and listening and they do not seem to belong to us. They do not respond to the pass-word."

At that every voice stilled and every face turned to our alcove-balcony where our captors, now four, gripped us and had lifted us to our knees.

"Throw 'em down!" came a chorus of voices, "throw 'em down!"

Down we were thrown, none too tenderly, but we landed without breaking any bones.

Two men clutched each of us and haled us towards the fire. There we had our first glimpse of Maternus, who sat on a pack, his back against the rock, not too close to the fire, the light of which played on his left cheek.

He looked plump and lazy.

"Strip them," he commanded.

As he was being obeyed somebody did something to the fire which increased the light it gave.

"Turn them round," Maternus commanded. "Humph," he commented, "by their faces they are a Roman gentleman and his Greek secretary; by their backs they are fugitive slaves with bad records."

"They are both branded," added Torix, who had been inspecting us.

"Where?" queried Maternus. "I don't see any brand marks."

"On the left shoulder, each of them," Torix replied.

"Humph!" Maternus commented, "rascally slaves and indulgent master, or canny owner of valuable, if restive, property."

Just as he said this there was a yell at our left and Caulonius Pelops rushed in from somewhere beyond the firelight, probably from outside the cave.

"Here's the solution of our dilemma," he cried. "We are all right now. We've two men who know Commodus by sight. This is Andivius Hedulio, my former master's nephew, and the other is his secretary, Agathemer."

"What, in the name of Mithras," Maternus breathed, "is your master's nephew doing in a cave in the Apennines, with his back all scourge-marks and a runaway-slave brand on his shoulder?"

Then ensued a long series of questions and answers, in the course of which Agathemer and I pretty well told our story.

Maternus asked the assemblage whether they believed us and the consensus was that they believed us and Pelops, who reminded them that Claudius had read to them lists of those involved in conspiracies, who had been executed or banished and their properties confiscated; that my name had been among those he read; and that he, Pelops, had then told about me; all of which most of them did not recollect at all, and the few who claimed to recollect it recollected only vaguely.

Maternus, in his mild way, suggested that we would make valuable additions to their association. Torix opposed the idea, but Maternus pointed out that no one of them had as much to gain by the Emperor's death as I had: that after it I might hope to be restored to my rank and wealth, and that, after my miseries, I ought to hate Commodus more viciously than any of them. The assemblage approved, and, while throat-cutting was not mentioned, as that was the obvious alternative, Agathemer and I took oath as brothers in the confraternity.

Upon this we were released and our wallets, cloaks, hats and staffs, which had been deposited before Maternus, were restored to us. But Maternus informed us that no member of the band was allowed any money of his own. We must give up to him any coins we had.

Agathemer spread his cloak, spread mine on it, and upon it I emptied my wallet, that all might see its contents. I was allowed to retain everything, except the denarii. Agathemer did the like, with the like result. But at the sight of his flageolet there were exclamations and questions. He kept it out when he repacked his belongings, only giving the coins to Maternus. After we had fed he played tunes on it, to the delight of the whole band. It seemed to me they would never let him stop playing that flageolet and I was desperately drowsy.

At last all were for sleep. Maternus decreed that Agathemer and I might climb up again on the dry shelf where we had been found. Neither he nor any of the band seemed to object to, or indeed to notice, the dampness of the cave floor.

Agathemer and I slept at once. Our precious amulet-bags

of course, had not been investigated, or so much as suspected, and were safe on our neck-thongs.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FESTIVAL

THUS most strangely, and through no fault of mine, I found myself a full fledged formally sworn member of a conspiracy against the life of Commodus.

Maternus, whether from innate considerateness or because it happened to coincide with his plans, let us have our sleep out and wake naturally. We woke hungry and fed with the whole band, totalling forty-nine with ourselves, according to my count and to the statement of Pelops. He was most absurdly, but naturally, more than a little shy and bashful at finding himself in a position of complete equality with me. As we ate he narrated his reasons for running away and how he had escaped to Clampetia, from there on a fishing-boat to Sarcapus in Sardinia, and from there on a trading ship to Marseilles. There he had attached himself to a slave-dealer and with him had travelled to Tolosa and Narbo, where he had gotten into trouble and had fled to the mountains. There he had joined some outlaws, who had joined Maternus.

The fellows who had found me and Agathemer told cheerfully how the shepherd lad, their local guide, who knew nothing of them except that they were accepted associates of some local mountain brigands, had been showing them the inner passages of the cave, into which Agathemer and I had not ventured, and, on their return, had proposed to lead them up the side-passage to the outlook-opening. There they had trodden on us and so captured us.

After eating we set out on our way southwards to Rome.

On the march, inevitably, I became acquainted with Maternus and marvelled at that most amazing man. I had heard of him, of course, for his exploits as mutineer, outlaw, insur-

gent and rebel had made him notorious, not only in Spain and Gaul, but in Italy, even among the circles of society amid which I moved by inheritance. His reputation for strength, vigor, valor, resolution, ruthlessness, ferocity and cunning had made me picture him as different as possible from what he really was.

He was neither tall nor burly and nothing about him gave any hint of the great strength for which he was reputed and which, on occasion, I have seen him exert. Only one man of the band was shorter than Maternus and no other looked so much the reverse of hard and tough.

Maternus, in fact, looked soft. His very outline was plump, his feet and hands small, his toes and fingers delicate. He was not a handsome man, but he was by no means ill-looking and in some respects was almost boyish, or even girlish. He had glossy, straight brown hair, soft brown eyes, a complexion almost infantile in its rosy freshness, and all his features were small, his ears close to his head, his mouth even tiny, his nose likewise: and withal, Maternus was habitually mild, serene of expression, slow and soft of speech, and deliberate in all his movements. I never heard him raise his voice or speak or act hurriedly or urgently.

Of course, I had been dumbfounded to find him in Italy and in the Apennines when everybody supposed him a hunted fugitive, hiding in the Pyrenees or the Cevennes; or even, perhaps, in the wilds of North Spain. Still more was I amazed at the boldness of a man who could conceive such plans for assassinating the Prince of our Republic and could feel serenely confident of being able to execute them.

He was perfectly open with me. He had been a worshipper and adorer of Aurelius. If Aurelius had lived to a reasonable old age, he averred, the Republic would have been firmly established, the Empire solidified, the administration purified and the frontiers defended. Everything that had happened in the past five years he blamed on Commodus. It was the indifference of Commodus which had ruined the administration of the army, so that incompetent, dishonest, and tyrannical un-

der-officers drove young patriots like himself into mutiny, outlawry and their consequences. Had Commodus been a capable ruler he and his fellow malcontents would have been listened to, placated and sent off, aflame with patriotic enthusiasm and bent on redeeming their past records, to hurl back from the hardest-pressed part of our frontiers the most dangerous foes of the Republic. Upon Commodus he blamed his mutiny, all the atrocities he had committed in the course of his insurrections, and all the blood he had shed, as well as all the towns he had sacked and burnt in the course of his raids; also on Commodus he blamed the destruction of his army of insurgents.

He freely discussed with me his plans for assassinating Commodus. I could not deny that they were brilliantly conceived.

Almost equally brilliant I thought his management of his expedition. From where I joined it, near the crest of the Apennines, somewhere between the head-waters of the Trebia and the Nura, we advanced on Rome as rapidly as footfarers could travel. In the Ligurian Apennines, until we had crossed the upper tributaries of the Tarus, the Macra and the Auser, and were between Luna and Pistoria, we travelled all together, tramping all night in single file after a guide and sleeping all day in well hidden camps. Everywhere we were well fed. Nowhere did we lose our way or meet anyone not forewarned and friendly. It was as if the highwaymen, brigands and outlaws of the whole Empire had formed an association, so that any of them could travel secretly anywhere by the help of those of the regions which they crossed. We advanced as if swift and reliable runners had preceded us, advised of our approach the outlaws of each district and they had prepared to entertain us and to forward us on our way.

From somewhere between Pistoria and Luca we broke up into small parties of three to seven, and travelled by day like ordinary wayfarers. Somewhere not far south of the Arnus we reassembled, evidently by prearrangement and as accurately as a well-managed military-expedition. Through the

mountains past Arretium we marched at night as in the Apennines. Again somewhere to the west of Clusium, before we reached the Pallia, we again dispersed. We struck the Clodian Highway about halfway between Clusium and the Pallia. From there we proceeded like ordinary footfarers.

Both between Pistoria and Arretium, along the byroads, and from the Pallia to Rome, on the Clodian Highway, I was in the party headed by Maternus himself, a party of five besides us two. When we dispersed near Luca I had noted that Torix, Pelops and Cossedo with two more made a party; and that Caburus took Agathemer with him.

As Maternus had been open with me about his past and his plans so he was perfectly frank about his attitude towards me.

"I assume," he said, "that you are delighted at the opportunity which chance and I have given you to assist in revenging yourself on Commodus. I similarly assume that you and Agathemer would keep any oath taken by you. But prudence compels a leader like me to take no chances. I must, as a wary guardian of my associates, take all possible precautions. You will understand."

We did understand. We were watched as if he assumed that we were on the alert for a chance of escape, as we were. On night marches a leathern thong was knotted about my waist and the ends knotted similarly about the waists of the man before me and the man behind me. Agathemer was made secure in a like fashion. When he lay down to sleep, after he had composed himself to rest, a blanket was spread over him and a burly ruffian lay down on either side of him, the edges of the blanket under them. I slept similarly guarded. On day marches Caburus kept Agathemer close to him; I was never out of sight of Maternus.

Somewhere in the Etrurian hills north of Arretium I overheard part of a conversation between Maternus and Caburus. They were talking of me and Agathemer.

"You cannot be sure," said Maternus. "By every rule of reason Hedulio ought to hate Commodus consumedly. But loyalty is so inbred in senators and men of equestrian rank, in all the Roman nobility, that he may have a soft place in

his heart for him, after all. Instead of doing his best to help us kill him he might try to shield him, at a pinch."

"Just what I have been thinking," said Caburus. "I am half in doubt about this enterprise, even now. Agathemer may after all, try to fool me and to shield Commodus, by pointing out some other man to me, at the crucial moment."

"If you suspect him of anything of the kind," said Maternus gently, "just drive your dirk good and far into him and be done with him. I'll be on the lookout for any hanky-panky from Hedulio. If I see the wrong look in his eye or the wrong expression on his face I'll make a quick end of him. I'll tolerate no treachery after oath given and oath taken."

It may easily be imagined how nervous and uncomfortable I felt after hearing this mild, soft-voiced utterance.

My anxiety was accentuated within an hour. Just as I, like the other members of the band, was composing myself to sleep, I heard high words, raised voices, threats, an oath and a yell. With the rest I rushed towards the sounds. There, with the rest, I saw Caulonius Pelops in the agonies of death, a dagger in his heart. One of our Spanish associates had momentarily lost his temper.

Maternus, calm and unruffled, mildly inquired the causes of the quarrel, affirmed his belief in the Spaniard's account, absolved him of all blame and ordered Pelops buried. Then, as if nothing happened, we all composed ourselves to sleep.

I did not sleep much. Evidently, stabbing on small provocation was taken as a matter of course among my present comrades.

At Vulsinii we had a sound sleep at an inn and a bountiful meal at dawn. We needed both before dark, for Maternus marched us the entire twenty-eight miles to Forum Cassii by sunset. I was in as hard condition as any of his band and I stood the long tramp well. Next day we paused for barely an hour, near noon, at Sutrium, and made the twenty-three miles to Baccanæ easily. The third day we even more easily made the twenty-one from Baccanæ to Rome. Rome, naturally, I approached with emotion. I had gazed back on it

from the road to Tibur, certain that I should never again behold it. And I was now about to enter it under most amazing circumstances, as the associate of cutthroats and ruffians, as a sworn member of a conspiracy to assassinate the Prince of the Republic, as the prisoner of a ruthless outlaw, as a suspected associate of a chieftain who might stab me at the slightest false action, motion, word, tone or look.

There is, I think, no view of Rome as one approaches it along the Via Clodia or the Via Flaminia which is as fine as anyone of a score from points on the Via Salaria and Via Tiburtina. But, on a clear, mild, mellow summer afternoon I caught glorious glimpses of the city from the higher points of the road as we neared it. The sight moved me to tears, tears which I was careful to conceal. I could not but note the fulfillment of the prophecy made by the Aemilian Sibyl. I could not but hope that I might survive to see Rome under happier circumstances.

Amid manifold dangers as I was, I was not gloomy. We entered the city by the Flaminian Gate, of course, and, in the waning light, walked boldly the whole length of the Via Lata, diagonally across from the Forum of Trajan, under his Triumphal Arch, through the Forum of Augustus, and across the Forum of Nerva past the Temple of Minerva and so to the Subura. All the way from the City Gate to the slum district I marvelled at Maternus: he never asked his way, took every turn correctly; and, amid the splendors of Trajan's Forum, behaved like a frequenter, habituated to such magnificence. Equally did he seem at home amid such crowds as he could never have mingled with. He comported himself so as to attract no remark.

As we passed the Temple of Minerva I sighed and remarked that I would give anything short of life itself for a bath.

"You need not give that much; we can bathe for a *quadrans,* and, since you mention it, we shall all be better for a bath."

"There is no reason why you and the rest should not

bathe." I rejoined, ruefully, "but with my back and shoulder a bath is no place for me."

"Pooh!" laughed Maternus, "you grew up in Rome and I never set foot in it till today, yet you know no bath you dare enter, while I can lead you to a bath-house where no one will heed or notice brand-marks or scourge-scars."

It was, in fact, close by and I had the first vapor bath I had enjoyed since leaving Villa Spinella. After we left the bath Maternus bought three cheap little terra-cotta lamps and a small supply of oil.

At the cheaper sort of cook-shop we ate a hearty meal, with plenty of very bad wine. Then we went where, manifestly, arrangements had been made for our lodging, in a seven-story rookery, such as I had never entered and had hardly seen from outside. Its entrance was from the Subura and opened near the middle of one of the long sides of the courtyard, the pavement of which was very uneven from irregular sinking and its many shaped stones much worn. Out in it, at almost equal distances from the ends, the sides and each other, stood two circular curb-walls, each about a yard high; one the well, whence was drawn all the water used by the inmates; the other the sewer-opening, down which went all manner of refuse. The ascent to the upper stories was by an open stone stair in one corner of the court. All round the court was an open arcaded corridor, running behind the stair in its corner. Above it were six similar arcaded galleries, one for each upper floor. The rooms, judging from those into which I looked through open doors, appeared all alike. Ours were floored, walled and roofed with coarse cement, full of small broken stone, and not very smoothly finished. The floors were worn smooth by long use. The only opening to each was the door, over which was a latticed window reaching to the vaulted ceilings of the gallery and room.

Our rooms were on the fourth floor. There were three rooms, each with three canvas cots. Maternus left the six others to dispose themselves as they pleased. He and I took the middle room. Quite as a matter of course he bolted

the door, drew his cot across it, and as soon as I had com posed myself to sleep, sat on his cot and blew out the littl terra-cotta lamp.

Next morning he quite unaffectedly discussed with me wha he was to do with me.

"In Rome, anywhere in Rome," he said, "you are likel to be recognized any moment. I took the risk yesterda evening; I had to, I never attempt impossibilities or worr over manifest necessities. But I never run unnecessary risk The natural thing to do with you is to leave you in thi room all day with two of my lads to watch you. I do no want to irritate you, but I see no other way."

"I'll agree to come back here and stay here quietly," said, "if you will let me go out first for a while with you o any man or men you choose. I want to go to the Temple o Mercury and I want you to give me back enough of my mone to buy two white hens to offer to the god."

"You surprise me," he said. "I shouldn't have expecte a man of your origin to pay particular attention to gainin the favor of Mercury. He is more in the line of men lik me. I am first and always devoted to Mithras, of cours But Mercury comes high up on my list. I've a mind to tak the risk, go with you and buy four hens, two for you an two for me."

Actually we went out together shortly after sunrise, dow the Subura, through Nerva's Forum, and diagonally acros the Forum itself. There I quaked, for fear of being recog nized; and marvelled at the coolness of Maternus. H feasted his eyes and mind on the gorgeousness about us, bu with such discretion that no one could have conjectured tha he was a foreigner, viewing Rome for the first time.

On down the Vicus Tuscus we went into the meat marke where he bought four plump, young, white hens. As w started on with them, each of us carrying two, he asked hi first question.

"What building is that?" nodding.

"The Temple of Hercules," I told him.

"I thought so," he said, "they always build his circula

We'll stop in there on our way back. I never miss a chance to ask his help."

Whereas, when I made my offering before my flight the previous year, the street had been deserted, since I passed along it within an hour after sunrise, now it was humming with unsavory life, the eating-stalls under the vaults crowded, throngs about the Babylonian and Egyptian seers who prophesied anyone's future for a copper, tawdry hussies leering before the doors of their dens, unsavory louts chatting with some of them, idlers everywhere. This festering cess-pool of humanity Maternus regarded with disdain and contempt manifest to me, but carefully concealed behind a bland expression.

When we came out of the Temple of Mercury, after making our offering, Maternus whispered:

"Walk very much at ease and as if your mind were as much as possible at peace; two men opposite are watching us."

I assumed my most indifferent air and carefully avoided looking across the street, except for one cautious glance from the lowest step of the Temple. Then I glimpsed, leaning against a pier of the outer arcade of the Circus Maximus, two men wrapped in dingy cloaks, for the morning had been cool. After we were in the Temple of Hercules, Maternus asked:

"Did you recognize them?"

"One I had never seen," I replied. "The other I have seen before, but I do not know who he is nor where I have seen him."

Not until after midnight that night did it suddenly pop into my head that he was the same man whom I had first seen on horseback in the rain on the crossroad above Vediamnum, the man whom Tanno had asserted was a professional informer and accredited Imperial spy, the man who had glanced into Nemestronia's garden and seen me with Egnatius Capito.

After we left the Temple of Hercules I expected him to conduct me back to our lodgings for the day. He never

suggested it, but kept me with him, strolling about the central parts of the city as if he had nothing to fear, walking all round the Colosseum and loitering through the Vicus Cyprius, frankly amused at the sights we saw there.

He had no difficulty in finding shops of costumers: on the eve of the Festival they displayed placards calling attention to their wares. The first we entered had no Prætorian uniforms; but, as if the request for them were a matter of course, its proprietor directed us to the shop of a cousin of his who made a specialty of them. There I was amazed that such laxity of law, or of enforcement of law, could possibly exist as would permit such a trade. There was evidently a regular manufacture for this festival of costumes simulating and travestying those of the Imperial Body Guard. We were shown scores of them and the shop had them in a great pile.

The tunics were genuine tunics formerly worn by the actual Prætorian Guards but discarded and sold as worn or faded. There were also many such kilts and corselets and helmets. But as helmets, corselets and even kilts wore out or lost their freshness more slowly than tunics, there were many imitation kilts and corselets of sheepskin painted, and many cheap, light helmets of willow-wood, covered with dog-skin. But all these had genuine plumes, as cast-off plumes were even more plentiful than second-hand tunics.

As there was a strict enforcement of the law forbidding the sale, transport, storage or possession of the weapons of any part of the military establishment the shields and swords which went with the costumes were all imitations; flimsy, but astonishingly deceiving to the eye, even at a short distance. The shields were of sheep-skin stretched over an osier frame, but painted outside so as to present the appearance of the genuine Prætorian shields. The baldricks and belts were also of sheep-skin, the scabbards of willow-wood, and the blades of the wooden swords of fig-wood, so as to be completely harmless.

When Maternus proposed to hire twenty-one of these suits the proprietor took it as a customary transaction, inspected and counted twenty-one costumes and stated the charge for

hiring them until the day after the Festival. But he also stated that he did not hire costumes except to his regular customers; strangers must not only make a deposit but produce as vouchers two Romans in good standing and well known. Seeing Maternus at a stick he added, easily and at once, that he sold costumes to any purchaser for cash, without question, and agreed to repurchase the same costumes after the Festival at nine denarii for every ten of the sale price, if the costumes were brought back in good condition; if damaged, he would even so repurchase them, but only at their damaged value.

Maternus at once agreed to buy on those terms and, without haggling, accepted the price asked and paid it in gold. He then arranged for porters to carry the costumes where he wanted them. This also was taken as a matter of course.

Followed by the porters we returned to our lodging. Maternus left two porters, with their loads, in the courtyard and with the third porter we climbed three flights of stairs. The porter bestowed his huge pack in my cell and there Maternus left me in charge of three of the men, with orders that two must watch me till he returned. The third was to be at my orders to fetch any eatables or drinkables I wanted; to this man Maternus gave a handful of carefully counted silver coins.

There I remained until next morning, sleeping all the time I could get to sleep and stay asleep; trying not to fret when awake; and by no means displeased with the food and wine brought me.

Maternus slept that night, as the night previous, with his cot across our door.

Next morning he said to me:

"I feel unusually reckless today. I've been thinking the matter over and it seems to me that, on the day of the Festival, there will be thousands of sightseers in dingy cloaks and umbrella hats. I am of the opinion that you will run little risk on the streets anywhere in the poorer quarters of the city. I'm going to take you out with me to see the fun. We'll keep far away from where Caburus and Cossedo and

their helpers are to take their stands. We'll see the morning fun and then eat a hearty meal and sleep all the afternoon."

Out we sallied, I and one varlet in our travelling outfit, Maternus and six more habited as imitation Prætorians. Two of the ruffians had a pretty taste in drollery and amused the crowd with buffooneries. Strange to say the crowds seemed to think that they travestied Prætorians to a nicety whereas neither had ever set eyes on a Prætorian and their antics were the product of mere innate whimsicality.

I found the procession really interesting, with its various wonders and marvels. I had never been in Rome at the time of the Feast of Cybele, which was, of all the Festivals of the Gods, peculiarly the poor man's frolic. And I had always wondered how it was possible so to tame and train two healthy full-grown male lions as to have them draw a chariot with Demeter's statue through miles of crowded streets. After seeing them pass I concluded that they were dazed by the glare, the crowds and the noise, and too cowed to be dangerous.

At the license in the streets I was amazed. I saw a dozen men, each attired as Prefect of the Palace; a score of loose women dressed in an unmistakable imitation of the Empress, consuls by scores and similar counterfeits of every honored official or acclaimed individual. In particular, every corner had a laborious presentation of Murmex Lucro, the most popular gladiator in Rome. Almost equally frequent were presentments of Agilius Septentrio, the celebrated pantomimist; and of Palus, champion charioteer.

And I saw, amid roars of laughter, jeers, cat-calls and plaudits, no less than three different roisterers got up, cautiously and in inexpensive stuffs, but recognizably, as caricatures of the Emperor himself; not, of course, in his official robes, but in such garments as he wore in his sporting hours. These audacious merrymakers were ignored by the police and military guards.

Not long after noon Maternus declared that he had had enough. We ate at a decidedly good cook-shop, where we had excellent food and good medium wine. When I waked

near sunset Maternus reported that he had slept all the afternoon: certainly I had.

He then explained to me that he was to make his attempt in the Gardens of Lucius Verus, where Commodus had this year decreed the torchlight procession. He was again entirely frank.

"Your part," he said, "will be merely to point out Commodus to me. If I decide not to make any attempt on him I shall expect you to return here with me and abide by whatever decision our association makes at its next meeting: I cannot foresee whether they will vote to disband or to plan another venture. If I make my attempt, and I think I shall, for, apparently, both Caburus and Cossedo have blenched or failed, since no rumors of any excitement have reached us, you will be free the moment you see me stab Commodus. You must then look out for yourself and fend for yourself: you and I are never to meet again unless by some unimaginable series of miracles."

And he gave me four silver pieces, saying:

"This will keep you in food for a long time, if you are sparing. Good luck!"

Then, habited as in the morning, we sallied out, and ate at a cook-shop we had never before entered, which was full of revellers dressed as votaries of Isis, as Egyptians, as outlaws, as Arabians, as anything and everything. And as we crossed the city on our way to the Aelian Bridge, as we were passing through a better part of it, I was struck with the craziness of the costumes, many imitating every imaginable style of garb: Gallic, Spanish, Moorish, Syrian, Persian, Lydian, Thracian, Scythian and many more; but many also devised according to no style that ever existed, but invented by the wearers, in a mad competition to don the most fantastic and bizarre garb imagination could suggest.

In the torchlit gardens I perceived at once that it would be very easy for Maternus to edge close to the actual bodyguard, mingle with them, pass himself off as one, get near the Emperor and make a rush at him. He had chosen a spot where the procession was to circle thrice about a great statue

of Cybele set up for that occasion on a temporary base in the middle of a round grass-plot. His idea was that I was to point out Commodus to him on the first round and he to consider the disposition of the participants in the procession and make his attempt on the second or third round.

Standing, as we did, in the front row of a mass of revellers packed as spectators along the incurved outer rim of the ring, we had a surpassingly good view of the procession as it entered the circle. There were various bands of votaries and then six eunuch priests, their faces whitened with flour, their garb a flowing robe of light vivid yellow, convoying a brace of panthers, pacing as sedately as the brace of lions in the morning procession, drawing a light chariot in which sat a diademed, robed and garlanded image of Cybele, very gaudy and garish. Behind the chariot paced two priests of Cybele, not Phrygian Eunuchs, but Roman officials, in their pontifical robes, a pair of dignified old senators, ex-consuls both, Vitrasius Pollio and Flavius Aper, full of self-importance. Then came the Chief Priest, tall, full-bearded, swarthy, his robes a blaze of gold and jewels, pacing solemnly, on either side of him, as assistant priest, a young Roman nobleman, chosen from the college of the Pontiffs of Cybele, habited in very gorgeous robes. One was Marcus Octavius Vindex, son of the ex-consul, a very handsome young man; the other, to my amazement, Talponius Pulto.

At sight of my life-long enemy who had always rebuffed my overtures towards the establishment of courteous relations between us, who had insulted me a thousand times, who had sponsored the informer whose insinuations had caused my downfall, revengeful rage and self-congratulation at my opportunity filled me.

For, between the two pompous old senators and this dignified, showy and impressive trio, capered a score of eunuch priests clashing cymbals and among them Commodus also clashing cymbals and amazingly garbed. I have never been able to conjecture how his headgear was managed. He had a band round his forehead and from that band rose a sphere of some light material, apparently a framework of whalebone

covered with silk, a sphere fully a yard in diameter, all gleaming with the sheen of silk, and white with an unsurpassable whiteness. His robe, or tunic or whatever it was, was of the same or a similar glossy white silk. Round his neck was a golden collar, and gold anklets of a similar pattern clanked on his ankles. From the links or bosses of the collar to the links or bosses of the anklets streamed silken ribbons of the same intense light yellow we had seen in the robes of the panther-keepers. Two of the eunuch priests fanned him with peacock feather fans, so that the ribbons fluttered and shimmered in the torchlight. He wore soft shoes or slippers of the same vivid yellow. Clashing his cymbals he shrieked and capered with the eunuch priests.

I was more than shocked to see the Prince of the Republic so degrade himself, to see him exhibit the acme of the craze for devising unimaginably fantastic costumes for this Festival.

Besides being shocked, I was terrified, even numb with terror. I knew that Maternus would never believe me if I indicated this gaping zany and asserted that it was our Emperor: yet Maternus had such an uncanny power of interpreting the expression of face of any interlocutor that I dreaded to tell him anything save the exact truth. I was in a dilemma, equally afraid to tell the truth, for fear the improbability of it would infuriate Maternus and convince him of my treachery; or to take the obvious course, for fear some subtle shade of my tone or look might similarly impel him to stab me.

As the convoy passed Maternus whispered, softly and unhurriedly:

"Which is he?"

In my panic I chose the less dangerous alternative. Pulto was by far the most Imperial figure in the throng; his great height, the fine poise of his head, his royal bearing, his regal expression, his stately port, all contributed to make him dominate the assemblage. I felt that Maternus might believe him Commodus and could never believe Commodus an Emperor or even a noble.

I indicated Pulto, haughty, dignified, handsome and magnificently habited.

Maternus, apparently, believed me implicitly.

He whispered again.

"I am sure to get him when they come round again. Watch for my blow. If I land or if I am seized, fend for yourself. Good luck and Mercury be good to both of us. Farewell."

As the procession came round again I could hear my heart thump; but, to my gaze, Maternus, handsome in his imitation Prætorian uniform, appeared the personification of calmness.

When again the Imperial zany and his fan-bearers and posturing eunuchs had passed us and the High Priest and his Acolytes were opposite us, Maternus slipped forward between two of the Prætorians of the escort.

At that instant I felt a grip on my arm and Agathemer's voice whispered:

"Come!"

Together we slunk back into the crowd, and when the yell arose behind us, presumably at sight of Pulto slaughtered by Maternus, we were well clear of the press and in the act of darting into the shrubbery. In fact we got clear away unpursued, unmolested, unhindered.

CHAPTER XVIII

GALLOPING

AS the Gardens of Verus are north of the Tiber we had no difficulty whatever in casting a wide circuit to the left and coming out on the Aurelian Highway. All the way to it we had met no one; on it we met no one. After striking the highway we walked along it as fast as we dared. We should have liked to run a mile or two, but we were careful to comport ourselves as wayfarers and not act so as to appear fugitives. The night was overcast and pitch dark.

We must have walked fully four miles, which is about one third of the way to Loria.

Then, being tired and with no reason whatever for going anywhere in particular, we sat down to rest on the projecting base-course of a pretentious tomb of great size but much neglected. It was so dilapidated, in fact, that Agathemer, feeling about by where he sat, found an aperture big enough for us to crawl into. It began to rain and we investigated the opening. Apparently this huge tomb had been hastily built by dishonest contractors, for here, low down, where the substructure should have been as durable and solid as possible, they had cheapened the wall by inserting some of those big earthenware jars which are universally built into the upper parts of high walls to lighten the construction. A slab of the external shell of gaudy marbles had fallen out, leaving an aperture nearly as big as the neck of the great jar.

As the rain increased to a downpour we wriggled and squirmed through the hole, barely squeezing ourselves in, and found the jar a bit dusty but dry and comfortable. We wrapped ourselves in our cloaks, rejoicing to be out of the torrent of water which now descended from the sky. Also we composed ourselves to sleep, if we could.

We discussed our situation. We had our tunics, cloaks, umbrella hats and road shoes, but no staffs, wallets or extras. Agathemer mourned for his flageolet. Between us we had seven silver denarii and a handful of coppers; Maternus had given Agathemer four denarii, as he had me, but early in the day, and he had broken one to buy two meals.

He said that Caburus had either feared to make an attempt on Commodus, or judged that no opportunity presented itself. Of Cossedo he knew no more than I. Caburus had turned him over to two ruffians to watch and he had eluded them in the crowds and made his way to the Gardens of Verus expressly to find me, if possible, and help me to escape.

He said that our coins could not be made to last any length of time. Nor could we well beg our way so near the city. Our store of gems in our amulet-bags was of no use,

because, as he said, he was personally known to every gem-expert in Rome. Perusia was the nearest town to northward where he might hope to find prompt secret buyers for gems of dubious ownership; Perusia was far beyond the reach of two footfarers, without wallets and with only seven denarii.

We argued that, whatever happened, the wisest course was to get some sleep. Agathemer declared that we could fast over next day and night, if necessary, and that we had best keep in our hole till next night, anyhow. I acceded and we went to sleep.

We were waked by loud voices in altercation. The sky had cleared, the late moon was half way up, and we conjectured that the time was about midway between midnight and dawn, the time when all roads are most deserted.

Close to us, plain in the brilliant moonlight, were two stocky men on roan or bay horses. The moonlight was bright enough to make it certain that they were wearing the garb of Imperial couriers. The trappings of their horses, frontlets, saddle cloths, saddle bags and all suited their attire.

But their actions, words, accents and everything about them was most discordant with their horses and equipment.

Both were so drunk that they could just stick on their stationary and impassive mounts, so drunk that they talked thickly. And they were disputing and arguing and wrangling with their voices raised almost to a shout. Thickly as they talked, we had listened to them but a few moments when we were sure that they were low-class highwaymen who had robbed two Imperial couriers, tied and gagged them, changed clothes with them and ridden off on their horses, but had stopped to drink, raw and unmixed, the couriers' overgenerous supply of heady wine; two kid-skins, by their utterances. Now they were reviling each other, each claiming a larger proportion of the coins than he had.

Here was a present from Mercury, indeed. It was a matter of no difficulty to crawl out of our hole, to approach Carex and Junco, as they called each other, to pluck their daggers from their sheaths and to render the highwaymen

harmless, to pull them from their saddles, tie their hands with the lashings of their saddle-bags and to gag them with strips torn from their tunics; for they were too drunk to know that they were being attacked; so drunk that each, as we dragged him from his horse, fancied that the other was assaulting him and expostulated at such unfair behavior on the part of a pal. So drunk were they that both were snoring before we tied their feet with more strips torn from their tunics.

Like sacks we hauled them out of the moonlight, into the shadow of the tomb and then stripped them except of their tunics, fitted on ourselves the accoutrements they had stolen, and thrust them, trussed, gagged, snoring and helpless, into the hole where we had taken shelter.

On horseback we rode like couriers, full gallop, passed Loria before the first hint of dawn showed through the moonlight and, about half way between Fregenæ and Alsium turned aside into a lovely little grove about an old shrine of Ops Consiva, a grove whose beauty and the openness of whose tree-embowered, grass-carpeted spaces was plain even by the moonlight.

As soon as it was light enough to see we took stock of our windfall. The horses were both bays and of the finest; their trappings new and in perfect condition. Our attire was made up of the best horsemen's boots, a trifle too large for us, but not enough to be so noticeable as to betray us, or even enough to make us uncomfortable; of horsemen's long rain-cloaks and of excellent umbrella hats, all of the regulation material, design and color. In the saddle-bags were excellent blankets, our despatches, legibly endorsed with the name, Munatius Plancus, of the official at Marseilles to whom we were to deliver them; and our credentials, entitling us to all possible assistance from all men and to fresh horses at all change-houses. From these diplomas we learned that our names were Sabinus Felix and Bruttius Asper.

This crowned our luck. We crowed with glee over the unimaginably helpful coincidence that these diplomas should be made out for couriers with the very names which we had

chosen at haphazard at the commencement of our flight and had been using to each other ever since.

The provision of cash was ample: besides plenty of silver there was more than enough gold to have carried us all the way to Marseilles, on the most lavish scale of expenditure, without resorting to our credentials to get us fresh horses.

We ate liberally of the couriers' generous provision of bread, cheese, sausage, olives and figs; well content to quench our thirst at the spring by the shrine. Then we muffled ourselves in our cloaks, tightened the straps of our umbrella hats, jammed them down on our heads, pulled the brims over our faces, mounted and set off, elated, sure of ourselves, well fed, well clad, well horsed, opulent, accredited, gay.

As couriers vary in their theories of horse-husbanding and in their practice of riding, we had a wide choice, and elected to get every mile we could out of these fine horses and not change until as far as possible from Rome. We found their most natural lope and, pausing to drink and to water them sparingly at the loneliest springs we descried, we pressed on through or past the Towers, Pyrgos, and Castrum Novum to Centumcellæ. That was all of forty-one miles from the shrine of Ops Consiva and full fifty from Rome, but, partly because we had to spare ourselves, as we had not been astride of a horse since we crawled through the drain at Villa Andivia, we so humored our horses that we arrived in a condition which the ostler took as a matter of course, and it was then not quite noon, which we both considered a feat of horsemanship.

At Centumcellæ we ate liberally and enjoyed the inn's excellent wine. Also we set off on strong horses. From there only the danger of getting saddle-sick after our long disuse of horses and the certainty of getting saddle-sore, as we did, restrained us. We tore on through Martha, Forum Aurelii, and a nameless change-house, spurring and lashing as much as we dared, for we dared not disable ourselves with blisters, changing at each halt and getting splendid horses, our diplomas unquestioned. Thus at dusk we reached Cosa,

forty-nine miles from Centumcellæ and a hundred and nine miles from Rome.

We dreaded that we should wake too sore to ride, perhaps too sore to mount, perhaps even too sore to get out of bed. But, while stiff and in great pain, we managed to breakfast and get away.

That day we, perforce, rode with less abandon, though we both felt less discomfort after we warmed to the saddle. We nooned at Rosellæ, thirty-three miles on, and slept at Vada, the port of Volaterræ, fifty-six miles further, a day of eighty miles. Next day we were, if anything, yet sorer and stiffer, certainly we were less frightened. So we took it easier, nooning at Pisa, thirty miles on, and sleeping at Luna, thirty-five further, a day of only sixty-five miles, rather too little for Imperial couriers. Our third morning we woke feeling hardened and fit: we made thirty-nine miles before noon and ate at Bodetia; from there we pushed on forty-five miles to Genoa, an eighty-four mile day, more in character.

At Genoa we were for taking the coast road. We were all for haste. We had ridden amazingly well for men who had not been astride of a horse for nearly a year; we had ridden fairly well for Imperial couriers; but we had not ridden fast enough to suit ourselves. From Cosa onward we had been haunted by the same dread. We had imagined the real Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix reporting their loss of everything save their tunics, we imagined the hue and cry after us, the most capable men in the secret service, riding fit to kill their horses on our trail. At Cosa, at Vada, at Luna we had waked dreading to find the avengers up with us and ourselves prisoners; at Rosellæ, at Pisa, at Bodetia, we had eaten with one eye on the door, expecting every instant to see our pursuers enter; so at every change-station, while our trappings were taken from our weary cattle and girthed on fresh mounts. So we were for the coast road as shortest.

But the innkeeper, who was also manager of the change-stables, told us that between Genoa and Vada Sabatia the

road was blocked by landslides, washouts and the destruction of at least three bridges by freshets. He advised us to take the carriage-road by Dertona, the Mineral Springs, Crixia and Canalicum. But we thought of the pursuers thundering after us and anyhow we wanted none of Dertona, recalling our encounter with Gratillus at Placentia. We took the coast road, and, though we had to ford two streams and swam our horses over one, although we had to slide down slopes and toil up others afoot, leading our horses after us, although a full third of the road was mere rough track, like a wild mountain trail, though the distance was all of forty-five miles, yet we slept at Vada Sabatia, very thankful to have done in one day what would have taken us at least three by the hundred and fifty-one mile mountain-detour through Dertona, and still more thankful for the lonely safety of the coast road.

From Vada Sabatia the coast road was better, but still far from easy. We were well content to noon at a tiny change-house between Albingaunum and Albintimilium and to sleep at Lumo, seventy-seven miles on. Next morning early, only six miles from Lumo, but six miles of hard climbing up a twisty, rock-cut road, we came out at its crest, where there is a wonderful view up and down the coast and out southwards to sea, and there passed the boundary of Italy and entered Gaul. That night we slept at Matavonium, eighty-four miles forward and but seventy-four miles from Marseilles.

So far we had had no adventures, had been accepted without question everywhere, had seen no look of suspicion from anyone, had encountered no other couriers, except those whom we met and passed on the road, we and they lashing, spurring and hallooing, each party barely visible to the other through the cloud of dust both raised.

On that day, our eighth out from Rome, at noon at Tegulata, we had adventure enough.

The common room of the inn was low-ceiled, I could have jumped and touched the carved beams with my hand. But it was very large indeed, something like thirty yards long and

fully twenty yards wide, with two Tuscan columns about ten yards apart in the middle of it, supporting the seven great beams, smoke-blackened till their carving was blurred, on which the ceiling-joists were laid. The floor was of some dark, smooth-grained stone, polished by the feet which had trod it for generations; there were six wide-latticed windows, and, opposite the door, a great fire-place, with an ample chimney above and four bronze cranes for pots or roasts. Each arm had several chains and actually, when we entered, four pots were boiling, and a kid was roasting over the cunningly bedded fire of clear red coals, the fresh caught wood at the back, where the smoke would not disflavor the roasting meat. It was the most civilized inn we had entered on our post-ride and spoke of the nearness of Marseilles, though every detail of its construction, furnishings and methods was Gallic, not Greek.

Unlike our inns, where the drink and food is set on low, round-topped, one-legged, three-footed tables, about which are placed the backless stools or low-backed, wooden-seated chairs on which the customers sit, it had, Gallic fashion, big, heavy-topped, high-set, rectangular, six-legged tables with benches along their long sides, others with chairs, like those at the ends of every table; solid, high-backed chairs, comfortable for the guests, whose knees were well under the high-topped, solid-legged tables.

Agathemer and I took seats at the table in the far corner to the right of the door; only two of the five were occupied, and they by but two at each; plainly local customers. We told the host that we were in haste and asked for whatever fare he had ready. He brought us an excellent stew of fowl, with bread and wine and recommended that we wait till he had broiled some sea-fish, saying they were small but toothsome, fresh-caught and would be ready in a few moments. The fish tempted us, and, so near Marseilles, we felt no hurry at all, for we meant to loiter on the road and pass the gate about an hour before sunset, calculating that the later in the day we arrived the better chance we had of delivering our despatches, as we must, without being exposed

as not the men we passed for, and of somehow disembarrassing ourselves of our accoutrements and donning ordinary attire bought at some cheap shop.

As we sat, tasting the eggs, shrimps, and such like relishes before attacking the stew, which was too hot as yet, there entered two men in the attire of Imperial couriers. Agathemer kept his face, but I am sure I turned pale. I expected, of course, that they would walk over to our table, greet us, ask our names, and like as not turn out intimates of Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix, so that we would be exposed then and there.

But they merely saluted, perfunctorily, and took seats at the table nearest the door on their left, diagonally the whole space of the room from us. Agathemer and I returned their salute as precisely as we could imitate it, thankful that they had saluted, so as to let us see what the couriers' salute was, for we had felt much anxiety all along the road, since neither of us, often as we had seen it, could recall it well enough to be sure of giving it properly, if we met genuine couriers, or, terrible thought, encountered an inspector making sure that the service was all it should be and on the outlook for irregularities.

The moment they were at the table they bawled for instant service, urged the host, reviled the slaves, fell on their food like wolves, eating greedily and hurriedly and guzzling their wine. We could catch most of their orders, but of their almost equally loud conversation, since they talked with their mouths full, we caught only the words "Dertona" and "Crixia"; these comforted us; either they had left Rome before us and we had overtaken them, or they came from Ancona or somewhere on the road from Ancona to Dertona or more likely from Aquileia, or somewhere on the road from it, or perhaps even from beyond it.

They disposed of relishes, boiling stew, a mountain of bread, and a lake of wine, besides olives and fruit, in an incredibly short time, and then, again perfunctorily saluting us, rushed out.

Our fish had just been served and were as good as prophe-

sied. A moment after the exit of the couriers there entered a plump, pompous individual, every line of whose person and attire advertised him a local dandy, while every lineament and expression of his face, his every attitude and movement, equally proclaimed him a busybody.

He walked straight to our table, bowed to us and nodded to one of the slave-waiters, who instantly and obsequiously vanished. Our new table-companion at once entered into conversation with us, speaking civilly, but with an irritating self-sufficiency.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am acquainted with many of your calling who pass through here, but I do not recall having ever seen you before. My estates are near Tegulata and I am chiefly concerned with wine-growing. My wines, indeed, are reckoned the best between Bæterræ and Verona. My name is Valerius Donnotaurus; may I know yours?"

I kept my eyes on his face as I introduced Agathemer as Bruttius Asper and he me as Sabinus Felix. It seemed to me that his expression was not altogether free from a momentary gleam of suspicion; but my anxiety might have seen what was not there, I could not be sure. At any rate he bowed politely, asked me whence we came, when we had left Rome, and the latest news. He commended our speed and our having overcome the difficulties of the coast road between Genoa and Vada Sabatia.

The waiter, according to some subtle characteristic of his nod, brought wine for three, which he assured us was wine from his estates, though not his best, yet worth trying, and he invited us to drink with him. We could not well refuse and we were glad to be able to praise the wine, which, for Gallic wine, was really not so bad. Before we had finished our fish he excused himself and went out.

We dallied with our food, counting on giving the two couriers time to get away before we came out into the courtyard. But we learned afterwards that, as we had shown our credentials and ordered fresh horses before we entered the inn, the change-master would not give them the two best horses which he was holding ready for us and had in the

yard no other horses. They had demanded our fresh horses, cursed him and blustered, but could not move him and so were still berating him when Donnotaurus came out to them. He, after introducing himself, asking their names and route and, commiserating them on the poor supply of horses, had casually inquired whether they were acquainted with two couriers named Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix. On their answering that they knew both of them he had chatted a while longer and then asked them to reënter with him the inn's common-room, alleging that they could assist him on an important matter touching the service of the Emperor. According to the change-master, who told us all this later, they had complied in a hesitating and unwilling manner, as if numb and bewildered.

We, dallying over some excellent fruit and the not unpalatable wine, knowing nothing of all this, saw the three reënter together and approach us, the couriers looking not only reluctant, but dazed: up to us Donnotaurus led them.

"Do you know these gentlemen?" he demanded.

"Never set eyes on them in my life," one of them disclaimed. The other nodded.

"I thought so!" Donnotaurus cried. "These men claim to be Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix. You say you know Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix. You do not know these men. Therefore they are passing under false names. They are not Imperial couriers, but some of the scoundrels who have been posing as Imperial couriers and using the post-roads for their own private ends. I thank you for assisting me to expose them. It now remains to arrest them!"

I had thought when the two entered first and saluted us that their expression of face was queer; now it was queerer: they looked like some of the deer we had seen in the net-pocket at Spinella, frantic to escape and seeing no way out.

One mumbled something about having barely seen Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix and not being sure that we were not they. But Donnotaurus neither heard nor heeded.

"Here, Tectosax!" he called to the host, "come help us

arrest these men! They are bogus! They are shams! They are not couriers!"

"One man arrest two!" the host demurred.

"I only want your help," Donnotaurus bawled. "Call Arecomus and the ostlers. They can make short work of it."

At this point Agathemer found his voice, and he spoke steadily, coolly and firmly, even with a bit of a drawl.

"Don't do anything you will have to be sorry for," he said. "Better not make any mistake."

At his utterance the two couriers were manifestly even more uncomfortable than before. But Donnotaurus only bawled louder to the host.

"I don't arrest travellers," the host protested, "I feed 'em. Arecomus don't arrest travellers, he horses 'em. Anyhow, there's no magistrate here; talking of arresting is folly.

"And I wish you'd quit your foolishness, Donnotaurus. This is the third row you've started here within six months. You're giving my inn a bad name and ruining my trade. You're my best customer, yourself, but you are more nuisance than all the rest of my customers put together. I'd rather you'd move out of the neighborhood or keep away from my inn than go on with such nonsense. I don't want anybody arrested on my premises or threatened with arrest. And you've nothing to go on in this case, anyhow."

Donnotaurus appeared at a loss, but obstinate and about to insist, when the doors opened and there entered a bevy of staff officers, all green and gold and blue and silver, clustered about a huge man in the full regalia of a general, his crimson plumes nodding above his golden helmet, his crimson cloak dangling about his golden cuirass, his gilt kilt-straps gleaming over his crimson tunic-skirt. There was no mistaking that incredible expanse of face, seemingly as big as the body of an ordinary man, those bleary gray eyes under the shaggy eyebrows, their great baggy lower lids, the heavy cheeks and the vast sweep of russet beard.

It was Pescennius Niger himself!

As he was later proclaimed Emperor and narrowly missed

overcoming his competitors and emerging master of the world, the mere encounter has a certain interest. Its details, I think, even more.

Up to us he strode.

"What's all this?" he demanded in his big, authoritative voice. Agathemer and I stood up and saluted.

I expected Agathemer, who knew the value of speaking first, to anticipate Donnotaurus, but he let Donnotaurus give his version of the affair.

"I'm competent to decide this," said Pescennius, "and I shall."

And he eyed us, asking: "What have you two to say?"

"In the first place," said Agathemer, "I ask you to examine our papers."

He took from the seat of his chair, where he had placed it as he stood up, our despatch bag, opened it, and displayed its contents; the package of despatches, our credentials, and the diploma entitling us to change of horses, with the endorsement of each change-master from Centumcellæ onwards.

Pescennius examined these meditatively.

"These papers," he said, "are in perfect order. But they do not prove that you are the men named in them though they incline me to believe it. I should believe it, but these men deny that you are Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix."

"And why do they deny it?" Agathemer queried triumphantly. "Why, because they were caught by this busybody and asked whether they knew Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix and they said they did; then haled in here by him and confronted with us and asked whether they knew us and of course said they did not, as they did not. And why do they not know us? Because they are not couriers at all, but men passing themselves off as couriers. Our papers are in perfect order, as you say. Ask them for their papers. They haven't any!"

By the faces of the two I saw that Agathemer had guessed right. They, in fact, were impostors. They had no despatches, no credentials, no papers at all, except a diploma with entries from Bononia, through Parma, Placentia and

Clastidium to Dertona and so onwards; a diploma so manifestly a clumsy forgery that, at sight of it, I wondered how it had fooled the stupidest change-master.

Pescennius barely glanced at it. To his apparitors he said:

"Arrest these three!"

In a trice Donnotaurus and the two impostors were seized.

To us he said:

"Gentlemen, I apologize for having doubted you, even for a moment. And I thank you for having so cleverly and quietly exposed these precious gentry. I shall keep an eye on them and on this local meddler; I'll investigate them in Marseilles.

"Meantime I must eat. So I'll remain here. You are in haste and you have eaten. Your horses are ready. I need not detain you. I'll see you at Marseilles tomorrow. I congratulate you on your horsemanship. To have overtaken me, even when I am travelling by carriage, is no mean exploit. I am pleased to have made your acquaintance."

And he bade us farewell, allowed us to pass out, and seated himself at our table.

CHAPTER XIX

MARSEILLES AND TIBER WHARF

WE rode the first mile at full gallop and then slowed to an easy canter which permitted of conversation. All the way to Calcaria we discussed our situation, prospects and plans. We revised our previous view and agreed that we had best not be too late entering Marseilles, as we might not have time to buy cloaks, hats and footgear, change and get rid of our equipment and find lodgings.

Then again, of course, we fell into a panic at the idea of riding into Couriers' Headquarters and perhaps facing a dozen men who knew Sabinus Felix and Bruttius Asper as well as we knew each other. We went over, for the tenth

time, a series of absurd suggestions and tried to conceiv some way by which we might sneak in at some other gat than that to which our road led, might avoid delivering ou despatches and might find ourselves safe in ordinary cloth in some obscure lodging.

But we came to the conclusion that it would be highl suspicious to act otherwise than as genuine couriers woul act. There was nothing for it but to ask our way to Courier Headquarters, which would not arouse suspicion, since courie unacquainted with Marseilles must be constantly arrivin there, as green or shifted couriers did at all cities; to rid boldly in; to take what came if we were exposed, to delive our despatches and stroll out for an airing if we had luc

Even if we had luck so far I could not forecast our bein able to buy ordinary clothing and change into it withou causing suspicion, investigation, and our arrest and ruin Agathemer argued that, if Maternus could find, in Rome, bath where we could bathe without anyone so much as noti ing our brand-marks and scourge-scars, he ought to be abl to find in wicked, easy-going Marseilles a shop whose pro prietor would ask no question except had we the cash. was palpitating with panic and could foresee in a shopkeepe only an informer, greedy for a reward for our apprehensio

Agathemer asked:

"Didn't I get us out of our troubles at Tegulata?"

"You certainly did!" I replied. "To a marvel."

"Well," he pursued, "I have full confidence in my intuitio and my resourcefulness. I feel that I can get us out o our troubles at Marseilles, if you will let me alone and no interfere."

"I certainly won't interfere," I said, "to spoil any chanc you think you see. If you see one, signal me and I'll let yo use all your dexterity."

After that we rode evenly to Calcaria and even gaily fro there to Marseilles, which we entered about two hours befo sunset of a mild, fair, delightful afternoon.

The gate-guard took our questions as a matter of cours and directed us to Couriers' Headquarters. There we foun

ly one very stupid Gallic provincial in charge, with a few
ves.

"I," said he, "am Gaius Valerius Procillus."

And he fingered the package of despatches, eyeing us
editatively. I quaked, but kept my countenance.

He eyed us yet longer, but made no comment, wrote out
formal receipt for the despatches, handed it to Agathemer
d said:

"Munatius will not be back here at Headquarters till to-
orrow. So I cannot tell you whether you will have a day
more of rest, which you have earned, or must set off again
once. Nor can I tell you whether, when you do set off,
will be back to Rome, or onward with some of these same
spatches to Spain or Britain or Germany.

"Make the most of your time for rest and refreshment.
ou are free till tomorrow at sunrise. Dromo will show
u your quarters."

And he beckoned one of the slaves.

Headquarters was a low rectangle of two stories only,
ilt of some stone like lime-stone, roofed with red tiles and
t about a spacious courtyard. The ground floor seemed
ostly stables; but, besides the office in which we had found
rocillus, it had other office rooms, a common-room, and we
impsed a bath and a kitchen. Dromo led us up the stone
air and along the colonnaded portico of the second floor to
an rooms, provided with comfortable cots, chests, stools,
d not much else.

We threw our wallets on our cots and sat on stools. As
on as Dromo was gone we opened our wallets, made our-
ves comfortable, disposed all our money about us in the
dy-belts we had bought at Genoa and went out, unopposed
d apparently unremarked.

Through the lively streets of Marseilles, in the mellow
ow of the evening sunshine, we made for the harborside,
gathemer nosing the air like a dog on the scent. Presently
remarked:

"We are not far from what I am looking for."

And he turned up a side street to our right. As we took

turn after turn each street was less savory and more di
reputable than the last till we were in a sort of alley pop
lated it seemed by slatternly trulls and trollops.

"This," said Agathemer, "is the quarter of the town I a
after, but not quite the part of it I want."

At the end of the alley he questioned a boy, a typical Ma
seilles street gamin. The lad nodded and led us still
our right, doubling back. After two or three turns Agath
mer was for dismissing him. But the lad insisted on co
voying us to some definite destination he had in mind.

Agathemer displayed a coin.

"Take that and get out and you are welcome to it," h
said. "If you do not agree to get out and to take it, y
get nothing."

The boy eyed his face, took the coin, and vanished.

Unescorted we strolled along a clean street, all whitewash
blank lower walls and latticed overhanging balconies; in t
walls every door was fast; through the lattices I thoug
I discerned eyes watching us.

Ahead of us a lattice opened and two faces looked out.
fact two girls leaned out. Their type was manifest: we
housed, well clad, well fed, luxurious, loose-living, ligh
hearted minxes.

One was plump, full-breasted, merry-faced, with intense
black and glossy hair, a brunette complexion and in h
cheeks a great deal of brilliant color, which I afterwar
found was all her own, but which at first I took for pai
She wore a gown of a yellow almost as intense as the ga
of the priests of Cybele in the Gardens of Verus. Its insi
ent yellow was intensified and set off by a girdle of bla
silk cords, braided into a complicated pattern, and by shoulde
knots of black silk, with dangling fringes, and by black si
lacings along her smocked sleeves.

Her companion was tall and slender and melancholy face
her hair a dull reddish-gold or golden-red, her face witho
color and a bit freckled, her gown of pale blue.

The black-haired girl called:

"You've had a long ride and you deserve recreation a

freshment. Come in. We don't know you two, but we ve entertained couriers before this. This is the place for u."

"Ah, my dear," Agathemer replied, "we not only have d a long ride but we may have to set out on a longer to-rrow, and you know the proverb:

" 'Light lovers are seldom long lopers.' "

"If you were too much disinclined to being light lovers," e girl retorted, "you'd never be strolling down this street. me in!"

"My dear," said Agathemer, "we'd love to come in. But nember the proverb:

" 'Gay girls are not good for great gallopers.' "

"Oh, hang your proverbs," the girl laughed down at us. don't know what you are up to, but I like you. You n't look as austere as you talk. And I don't mind your eticism. If you don't appreciate the entertainment of-ed you, you can have any sort of entertainment you prefer. goblet of wine and an hour's chat won't enervate you or ke you less fit. Come in."

A horrible old Lydian woman, one-eyed, obese, clean enough body and clothing, but a foul old beast for all that, let in.

Agathemer introduced me as Felix and himself as Asper. e merry dark-haired girl was named Doris and her lan-orous comrade Nebris. A more garish and gaudy creature an Doris I have never beheld. I was struck with her pro-sion of jewels, mostly topazes, but also many carbuncles d garnets; rings, bracelets, a necklace, a hair-comb and ny big-headed hair pins. Nebris was equally bejewelled th turquoises and opals, but, somehow, they did not glitter e the jewelry on Doris, but partook of their wearer's sub-ed coloring. As Doris remarked next day:

"Nebris is very graceful and almost pretty; but she was rn faded, and nothing can brighten her."

We found the girls housed in as neat, cosy and charming little nest as heart could wish for. The atrium was tiny, e courtyard was tiny, everything was tiny. But it all had

an air which put us at our ease and made us feel at hon
Doris, the dark-haired, red-cheeked, full-contoured lass, w
plainly much taken with Agathemer and he with her;
always had a weakness for red-headed girls and felt gen
inely pleased that Nebris, her long-limbed, long-finger
pale-skinned, blurred, bleached comrade seemed equa
taken with me. The sofas of the tiny *triclinium* were s
and comfortable and, after eight days in the saddle, witho
a bath, we were glad to loll on them. The wine was good an
without any effort, the four of us fell into cheerful chat
about nothing in particular. I complimented Doris on h
dwelling and its furnishings and she at once insisted
showing us all over it: the kitchen, bath and latrine beyo
the tiny courtyard and upstairs a second *triclinium*, as ti
as that below, and four tiny bed-rooms, with handsome
carved beds, piled with deep, soft feather beds and feath
pillows. Doris and Nebris each had her bed-room furnish
to harmonize with her own coloring. I complimented bo
on their taste.

In Nebris's room Agathemer spied a flageolet.

"Do you play on this?" he asked.

"Sometimes," she said, "but Doris declares that my mu
makes her melancholy, it's so dismal."

"I'll play you any number of lively tunes," Agathem
promised, possessing himself of the flageolet.

We all went down into the lower *triclinium*, where we h
left the wine, and Agathemer charmed the girls with h
music and, indeed, enlivened me as much as them.

After a score of tunes, while our first goblets of wine we
not yet emptied, Agathemer said:

"Felix, I believe I see a way out of our troubles."

"Asper," I replied, "I leave it all to you."

"Doris, my dear," said Agathemer, "we are not Imperi
Couriers at all."

Doris stared.

"You mean it?" she asked.

"So help me Hercules," said Agathemer solemnly.

"Well," she meditated, with a sharp intake of her breath. You fooled me. I thought you were genuine. How did you come in this rig?"

"We belong in Rome, both of us," Agathemer began. How we came in Placentia is no part of the story. But we were in Placentia and we got into trouble. It wasn't serious trouble; we hadn't killed anybody, or stolen anything, or cheated anybody; but it was trouble enough and aplenty and we decided to get out of Placentia. Roads, road-houses, the towns wouldn't have been healthy for us just then, so we took to the mountains. Not as brigands, you understand, but we hadn't much cash and coin will go farther in the mountains than anywhere else; and the weather was fine and we meant to camp out all we could and stay out all summer and let things blow over. It was hot, burning hot and we blundered on a cave, a nice, big, airy dry cave. We went in to cool off and sleep. And we slept sound."

Then he told our entire story, just as it happened, from our capture by Maternus and his band, all down to Rome, to the Gardens of Verus, out along the Aurelian Highway among the tombs, all about the two drunken robbers in the moonlight, all about our gallop along the coast, all about our encounter with Pescennius Niger.

Nebris kept looking from Agathemer to me, her pale gray eyes wide; but Doris kept her snapping brown eyes on Agathemer's face from his first word to his last.

"My!" she cried, "you have had adventures! Or you are the biggest liar and the cleverest story-teller I ever met. If you invented that story you deserve help as a paragon among improvisators; if you had all those adventures you deserve help ten times over and you certainly need it. Somehow I believe you. I'll help you all I can. You are in the right place."

And she called:

"Mother, tell Parmenio to find Alopex and bring him to me at once. Tell him to be quick."

One of the slaves went out, slamming the door after him.

"Doris," said Nebris, "can you really save these lads?"

"I can!" Doris asserted.

"With Pescennius Niger after them?" Nebris quavered.

"Even with Pescennius Niger after them," Doris declare

"You must remember," she went on, "that Pescennius to these lads he would not expect to see them till tomorro morning. That gives me till dark to set things going a till about two hours after sunrise to finish the job. Unle indeed, messengers announcing the robbery of the real Sa nus Felix and Bruttius Asper happen to overtake Pescenni at Tegulata or between there and Marseilles. Even then can hardly get on these lads' trail before dark. I think shall be able to get these lads away safe, no matter wh happens. Anyhow let's be cheerful and make the best things."

And she filled our goblets.

Alopex could not have been far away. Very shortly heard the door open and shut and a youth came in, who Doris introduced as Alopex. A more repulsive being I ha never seen. He was of medium height, slender, habited the embroidered, be-fringed garb fashionable among Ma seilles dandies, his hair curled and perfumed, his fa much like a weasel's, his complexion like cold porridge. then had my first glimpse of a Marseilles pimp, and I nev want to see another. To me he looked capable of any mea ness, of any treachery, of any dishonor, of any crime.

"Alopex," Doris commanded, "look these gentlemen ov and take their measure, then go out and buy hats, cloak boots and wallets for them, suitable for a sea-voyage, as i conspicuous as possible, durable and water-proof. Get porter and bring them back with you, in a bag, so no one the streets will know what the porter is carrying. Be quick

"Six gold pieces," said Alopex.

"If you spend six gold pieces on that outfit," said Dor "you are an ass; you shall have six gold pieces, but bring ba a reasonable sum in change, after paying the porter."

I gave Alopex six gold pieces and he went out.

"When he comes back," Agathemer asked, "can he pilot

a bath where we shall be as safe as Felix was in Rome in
e bath which Maternus knew of?"
"He can and he shall," Doris replied. "You two certainly
ed a bath: and however you are marked by scourges and
ands, the marks won't be noticed at the bath to which he
ll lead you."
"How about a dinner?" Agathemer queried.
"Asper, my dear," said Doris, "you said you had plenty
cash."
"We have," said Agathemer.
"Then," said she, "just give me one of those gold pieces
u got from the two drunken robbers and while you are
thing I'll order as fine a dinner as Marseilles affords and
ve it here ready to serve when you two get back from your
th."
Alopex soon appeared with a complete outfit for us and
e prices which he announced appeared reasonable to me and
re agreed to by Doris. He handed Agathemer a gold piece
d three silver pieces.
"Change," Doris commanded, and we took off our boots
d put on those Alopex had brought us. Doris had Par-
enio bundle up our couriers' attire, boots and hats and
d:
"I hate to see anything wasted. These outfits are going
be found at Couriers' Headquarters and no one will ever
spect how they got there. You can arrange that, Alopex,
n't you?"
"Easy as that," said Alopex, snapping his fingers.
"Then you do it," she ordered, "and now take these gentle-
en to Sosia's bathhouse and give him the tip that they are
right."
Alopex acceded sulkily but obediently. That bath refreshed
e amazingly and Agathemer seemed to enjoy it as much
I did. It was after sunset when we were back with Doris
d Nebris, but still far from dark; in fact, light enough to
e well.
"Now Alopex," said Doris, briskly, "make your best speed
the harborside and see if you can find a sure ship sailing

at dawn, with a captain we can trust, to get these lads ou of Marseilles at once. I doubt if you can find one, but d your best."

"We want a ship for Antioch," Agathemer put in.

"Alopex," said Doris, "find a ship to get these lads out o Marseilles at dawn, never mind where it is bound for. Nov go. And come back and report, tonight, sure, and as soo as you can."

When he was gone she rounded on Agathemer:

"Asper," said she, "I am ashamed of you. You are fool. With Pescennius Niger likely after you, foaming at th mouth, raging because he let you slip through his fingers you talk of picking and choosing a destination? Why lad, i makes no difference where the ship is bound so it is sea worthy, has a captain I can trust and is headed away fron Marseilles. The point for you two is to get away from Mar seilles quick. Whether you land at Carthage, or even Cadiz makes no difference. You can reship from anywhere to any where, once you are clear of Marseilles. You might linge in Marseilles, under my protection, but for your encounte with Pescennius Niger. But after that there is nothing fo you to do but get away quick."

She paused for breath, shaking her finger at us, like nurse at naughty children.

"And now," said she, "let's get at that dinner. I'm hungr and I'm sure you ought to be."

We were. And the dinner was excellent, much of it un familiar. The Marseilles oysters had a flavor novel, odd, no agreeable at first, but very likable after a bit of experienc with it. Everything out of the sea was tasty. The mai dish was a wonderful stew of fish, for which, Nebris told us Marseilles was famous. It was flavored with any number o vegetables and relishes, and had bits of meat in it, but fis was the chief ingredient and the blended flavors made it most appetizing viand.

We ate slowly, had just finished our fruit and Agatheme was playing the flageolet to the accompaniment of enthusiasti applause from both girls when Alopex returned. He reporte

that no ship could possibly be gotten for us the next morning and vowed that it would likely take him all day to find one for the morning after.

"Then run off, like a good boy," said Doris, "and get a good long sleep so as to be fresh tomorrow. Start before daylight and report to me before noon. Run along."

"How about lodging for us?" Agathemer queried.

Doris half chuckled, half snorted.

"Run along, Alopex," she commanded.

When he was gone she faced Agathemer, arms akimbo.

"Asper," she said, "I'm going to save you two lads, no matter how idiotically you act or talk. I like you, in spite of your ridiculous ascetic airs and your nonsensical assumption of austerity. You can't make me angry nor lose my protection, no matter how rude and chilly you are. If you two don't appreciate the kind of entertainment we are offering you and haven't sense enough and manners enough to accept it and be thankful, you can sleep here anyhow, where and how you prefer. But you don't go out of this house tonight, nor yet tomorrow, not if I know it. I'm going to save you two, in spite of your folly."

Naturally, after that, we stayed where we were.

Next morning, not much more than an hour after sunrise, as we were again enjoying flageolet music from Agathemer, Alopex returned and reported that he had found a clean, roomy, seaworthy ship, captained by a man well and favorably known to him and Doris, which would sail for Rome at dawn next day.

"That's your ship," said Doris to us.

"After what I told you," Agathemer protested, "do you seriously advise us to set sail for Rome?"

"I do," Doris declared. "Any place on earth is healthier for you two than Marseilles. Were you in trouble in Rome before you got into trouble in Placentia?"

"We were," said Agathemer, "and trouble of the deepest dye."

"Asper, my dear," said Doris, "no matter what sort of trouble you were in at Rome, Rome can't be as dangerous for

you as Marseilles. And by all I hear, Tiber Wharf is a fine locality in which to hide and Ostia nearly as good. Take my advice and sail. From Rome or Ostia you ought to find it easy to ship for Antioch."

"I believe you," said Agathemer, "but I'd like to have more cash with me than I have and I'd like to give you two girls enough gold pieces to serve as a sort of indication of our gratitude. No gold either Felix or I shall ever possess would be enough to repay you for what you have done for us.

"Now I have an emerald of fair size and of the best water and flawless at that, sewn into the hem of my tunic. Since you are so capable at finding safe shops and baths and ships, perhaps Alopex could guide me to a gem-expert who would like to buy a fine emerald and who would pay a fair price for it and keep his mouth shut."

"I had not meant you so much as to poke your nose out of doors till tomorrow before sunrise," said Doris, meditatively, "but Pescennius won't be suspicious yet unless a post with news of the robbery you profited by has already reached here. I fancy it will be a safe risk for Alopex to escort you to our gem-expert. He'll pay you an honest three-quarters of the full value of your emerald. Alopex and I get a rake-off on his profits, as we do on the fare of the men we ship out of Marseilles. Gems and fugitives are part of my regular line of trade, with efficient help from Alopex."

Actually Agathemer was gone about two hours and came back with a portly bag of gold pieces. He found us in the *triclinium*, Nebris lying on the sofa with me, and playing a dismal tune on her flageolet, Doris on the other sofa laughing at us. He lay down by Doris, spilled the gold on the inlaid dining table, divided it into four equal portions, pouched one, made me pouch another, and piled one in Doris's lap, while I similarly piled the other in Nebris's lap.

"Share and share alike," said Agathemer, "and you are welcome to whatever part of his rake-off Alopex turns over to you."

"Asper," said Doris, "you are a dear. Play us a decent tune. Nebris's music makes me doleful."

We spent the day eating, drinking, chatting, napping and listening to Agathemer's very lively music.

For dinner we had another Marseilles fish-stew, entirely different from the former, and entirely different from anything I had ever eaten elsewhere.

Next morning Doris had us all up, bathed as well as we could in her tiny bath, fed and ready to set out long before the first streak of dawn appeared in the east. Agathemer, on his gem-selling expedition, had bought all we needed to line our wallets except food, and that Doris supplied in abundance and variety and of a sort calculated to be palatable two or three days out at sea.

Doris was a creature no man could forget. She was buxom and buoyant and completely content with her home, her way of life, her friends and her prospects; and as capable and competent a human being as I ever met. When Alopex gave his cautious tap on the door and slipped inside she bade us farewell unaffectedly, kissed me like a mother, and gave Agathemer one sisterly hug and one smacking kiss. If there were tears in her eyes none ran down either cheek.

Nebris, on the other hand, wept over me and clung to me, with many kisses.

"There are not many like you," she sobbed. "You are gentle and courteous. Our friends are generous enough, but they drink too much and are boisterous and rough and coarse. I wish you weren't going. But I'm glad I've had you even for so short a time."

And she gave Agathemer her flageolet, holding it out to him with her left hand, her right arm round my neck.

"Come, come!" Doris bustled, "act sensible, child!"

We tore ourselves away and followed our unsavory guide through the dim, foggy streets. I distrusted Alopex and should not have been astonished had he turned us over to a batch of guards, waiting for us at any corner. But he led us to a fine stone quay by which was moored as trig a merchantman as I ever saw, new and fresh painted. Her captain was a bluff, hearty, wind-tanned Maltese, Maganno by name, swarthy, hook-nosed and with a shock of black curls. He

counted the gold pieces Alopex gave him and said, in Latin with a strong Punic accent:

"My ship is yours from here to Tiber wharf."

We shook hands on it, went on board and she cast off at once and was out of the harbor before the sun had dispersed the fog. To our surprise we set a course not about south-east as we had expected, but along the coast until we passed Ulbia, and then almost due east. Maganno explained:

"Give me the open sea. You Italians are always for hugging the shore: we Maltese, like our Phœnician ancestors, are all for clear water. I've sailed between Corsica and Sardinia, and once was enough for me. I've made this cruise many times and I always prefer to weather the Holy Cape."

North of Corsica, in fact, we sped, with a fair following wind and we had an unsurpassably fortunate voyage; skies clear, wind always favorable, steady and neither too gentle nor too strong. Our time we spent on deck from before sunrise till long after sunset, dozing through the heat of the day; Agathemer, when awake, playing on his flageolet, more often than he was silent, to the delight of all on board. The crew were mostly Maltese, like their master, using indifferently their own dialect, Greek of a sort and very poor Latin. Maganno's Latin was better than theirs, but all racy with his accent.

When we were already in sight of the mouth of the Tiber he sat down by us and said:

"I was told that you lads were in trouble. But, certainly, you are lucky voyagers. I have sailed from Ostia to Marseilles and from Marseilles to Ostia forty-one times, and this forty-second is the easiest and quickest passage ever I made. I like you lads. Anybody Doris recommends I always help, for her sake. I'll also help you for your own. Tell me your plans and I'll do my best for you."

He agreed with us that both the Northern Harbor and Ostia were certain to be swarming with spies and secret-service agents and informers: so, for that matter, was the harbor-side of Rome along the Tiber: but Rome, being many times

as large as Ostia, was likely to be proportionately easier to hide in.

"That's where a small merchantman like mine," said he, "beats any big one. That's why I sail always a small ship, never a big ship. A big merchantman must berth at Ostia or at the Northern Harbor. My ship can sail on up the Tiber to Rome. And I shall. You come on up with me."

His advice seemed good. We decided to stay on the ship all the way up to Rome, and we did, lolling on deck to Agathemer's piping in the mellow sunshine.

So idling we spoke more than once of the Aemilian Sibyl and of this second fulfillment of her acrid prophecy.

Maganno promised to find us a ship loading for Antioch; seaworthy, roomy and with a trustworthy captain.

This could not be done quickly and, he found us, meantime, lodgings with a friend of his, a fat, bald, one-eyed cookshopkeeper named Colgius, who rented us a tiny room over his eating-room, which was not far from the Ostian Gate, between the public warehouses and the slope of the Aventine.

At his table we fared pretty well, for his prices were low, his wine drinkable, and most of his food eatable, though we did not try a second time the viands for which he had the briskest demand: a very greasy pork stew of which he was inordinately proud, amazingly rank ham, and incredibly strong Campanian cheese; all three of which seemed to delight his customers, who were an astonishing medley of slaves and freemen: porters, stevedores, inspectors' assistants, coopers, mariners, jar-markers, gig-drivers, teamsters, drivers of all sorts of hired vehicles, drovers who herded cattle from Ostia to the cattle-market, vendors of sulphur-dipped kindling-splints, collectors of street filth and others equally low in class, equally novel to me.

Colgius took a fancy to us and undertook to show us Rome. It struck me oddly that, whereas Nona, in every fiber an Umbrian Gaul, and Maternus, who had spent all his life beyond the Alps, had both, at first glance, recognized us for what we were, Roman master and Greek servant, this Roman

of the Romans, keen for personal profit, habituated to the sight of men from all ports, accepted us for Gallic provincials, and never suspected that we were anything else.

CHAPTER XX

CHARIOTEERING

SIGHT-SEEING in Rome, in the guise of Gallic wastrels, under the tutelage of a harborside slum host, was truly an experience for me after my former station as a nobleman of the Republic, and my ruin and disguise and flight. I positively enjoyed it.

First of all Colgius was for showing us over the stables of the Reds, for he was mad about racing and boasted that he had bet on the Reds since he was six years old and his father gave him his first copper. But I demurred and pointed out that none of the racing-stables were fit places for us, since a steady stream of Spanish horses trickled through Marseilles and on through Vada Sabatia and Genoa to Rome, and there was too great a probability that we might come face to face with some groom, hostler or hanger-on from Marseilles who would know us at sight. Colgius yielded to this argument and agreed that we must avoid all the racing stables. This greatly relieved us, since, while neither I nor Agathemer had been devotees of the sport, both of us had been through all six establishments often enough to be likely to be recognized in any one of them.

Baffled in his first choice and, apparently, in his only choice, Colgius asked us what we wanted to see. I said I wanted most to see a day of racing in the circus, blurting out this rather foolish utterance without reflection, merely because I thought it would seem natural to him. He replied that that would be easy, but that the next racing day was day after tomorrow: what would we like to do today?

I said I wanted first of all to be shown the Temple of Mercury, for I wanted to make an offering to the god.

"Oh, yes," he said, "Mercury is your chief god in Gaul, isn't he, and you put him ahead of Jupiter. What is it you call him?"

"You are thinking of the Belgians," I said, "and of the Gauls in the Valley of the Liger. They call Mercury Tiv or Tir and regard him as their chief god. But we provincials never had any such ideas: we worship the same gods as you, in the same way. But I, personally, while revering Jupiter as king of the gods, have always particularly sought the favor of Mercury."

Off we went to the meat market and I bought there two white hens, as on the day of my flight, more than a year before. With one under each arm I then followed Colgius to the Temple of Mercury and there made my prayers and offering.

When we came out he, of course, began to display the outside of the Great Circus and to tell me of its glories, which, he said, he would show me from the inside the day after tomorrow. The life there was much as Maternus and I had seen it twenty-three days before.

We could not avoid following Colgius about Rome, round the Palatine, the Colosseum and the Baths of Titus and through the Forums of Vespasian, Nerva, Augustus and Trajan. At Trajan's Temple he reiterated his regrets that we dare not go on to the stables of the Reds, and turned back through Trajan's Forum, the Forum of the Divine Julius and the Great Forum. Of course, I was quaking with dread for fear some lifelong acquaintance would recognize me, even in my coarse attire. But none did: in fact I set eyes on no one I knew, except Faltonius Bambilio, who was pompously lecturing ten victims in the Ulpian Basilica. I was certain that his eyes were only on his auditors; the sight of him did not alarm me, he never paid any attention to those he considered his inferiors.

All along Agathemer and I were bursting with suppressed giggles: Colgius paid very little attention to the Palace, the Great Amphitheater, the magnificent public baths, the temples or to any of the glories about us; he was all for

cook-shops and hauled us into cook-shops without number, sometimes presenting his Gallic friends, Asper and Felix, to his good friend, the proprietor, sometimes bursting into invectives against the bad cookery, infinitesimal portions or absurd prices of his enemies' establishments. In cook-shops Agathemer and I felt safe, near a cook-shop we felt almost safe, between cook-shops, companioned by Colgius and any cook-shop frequenters we met, we felt more than a little safe. To our thinking no spy, informer or secret service agent would feel suspicious towards Colgius and his friends, nor towards us in their company, and he presented us to idlers, loafers, touts, betting agents, sellers of tips on the races, friends of jockeys, cousins of hostlers and such like to an amazing number.

We found all Rome, as we saw it in the company of Colgius, humming with two names and we made sure that, if they buzzed in such company as we were in they also formed the chief topics of conversation in all parts of the city and at every level of society from the senators down.

One name we had heard when in Rome with Maternus, but had barely heard it; now we heard it everywhere; the name of Palus, the charioteer; Palus, the incomparable jockey; Palus, the king of horsemasters; Palus the chum of Commodus. Both of him, and about him, not only from the men who talked to us, but also from bystanders, diners and idlers, who never noticed us or knew that we overheard them, we heard the most amazing stories:

He could guide six horses galloping abreast between the test-pillars for tyros driving four-abreast and never jostle a pillar or throw a horse; he had done it time after time; he had won three races, driving seven horses abreast, his competitors driving four abreast; he had won a race, with a team of four Cappodocian stallions, guiding them without reins, by his voice only; he was the most graceful charioteer, bar no one, ever seen in Rome.

As to his origin and personality the stories were not only fantastic, but divergent, contradictory or incompatible.

If we might believe what we heard he had been presented

to Commodus by the same nobleman who had presented Murmex Lucro, and on the very next day; he was from Apulia; he was a Roman all his days; he was a Sabine; he was a nobleman in disguise, he had been a foundling brought up in the Subura; he was a half brother of Commodus, offspring of an amour between Faustina and a gladiator, reared in Samnium on a farm, lately recognized and accepted by the Emperor; he was Commodus himself in disguise.

All this, you may be sure, made us prick up our ears. Still more did we at the sound of the other much-bandied name. Here again the tales were varied, inconsistent, antagonistic.

But the name!

That name was:

Marcia!

Marcia was in control of Commodus, of the Emperor, of the Republic, of the Empire. She was domiciled in the Palace, she was treated as Empress, she had all the honors ever accorded an Empress except that she never participated in public sacrifices or other ceremonial rituals. Crispina had been divorced and was no longer Empress, but had been relegated, under guard, to a distant island; Crispina was still Empress, but had withdrawn in disdain from the Palatine, occupied the Vectilian Palace on the Cælian Hill, still received Commodus when he visited her, but would not set foot on the Palatine nor take part in any ritual or ceremonial; Crispina had been murdered by Marcia's orders, in her presence, with the Emperor's consent; Marcia got on well with the Empress, there was no jealousy between them, Crispina was glad to have someone who could soothe Commodus in his periodic rages and humor him when he sulked; every possible variety of story about Crispina was told, but every tale represented Marcia as undisputed and indisputable mistress of the Palace and of everybody in it.

Of her origin we heard mostly versions of the true story; often we heard named Hyacinthus and Ummidius Quadratus, never my uncle nor Marcus Martius. We dared not seem to know anything about Marcia and so could not name Mar-

cus Martius or ask after him. From all the talk we heard, addressed to us or about us, his name was as absent as if he had never existed.

How Marcia came to the Emperor's attention, won his notice, acquired her mastery of him, as to all this we heard not one word: of her complete control of him and of all Rome everyone talked openly.

The next day we escaped the unwelcome attention of Colgius because Maganno came after us to introduce us to the captain who was to take us to Antioch, to show us his ship, and to make sure we knew the wharf at which she lay and how to reach her. The ship was to sail two days later. The captain's name was Orontides, which struck both me and Agathemer as being the same as that of the most fashionable jeweler in Rome, whose grandfather had come from Antioch, where, I suppose, the name would be as natural and frequent as Tiberius with us.

He was a Syrian Greek, with curly brown hair and brown eyes, by no means so wind-tanned and weather-beaten as Maganno, but manifestly a seaman. He was bow-legged and had very large flat feet.

Orontides looked us over, approved us, required a deposit of twenty gold pieces, counted them, said we might pay the rest of his charges at Antioch, and we shook hands on the bargain.

Yet, as the cost of the voyage would land us in Syria with but a few coins, it was well for us that, later in the day, Agathemer found a dealer in gems lately come to Rome and sold him another jewel. This filled our pouches and left us certain of having gold to spare until he could manage to find a purchaser for yet another gem in Antioch or elsewhere.

Colgius, when we returned to our lodgings, talked of nothing but the Games which were to be celebrated next day. He first exhibited the togas which he had hired for us to wear; we, as fugitives, having, of course, no togas of our own. We found them clean and tried them on. Colgius approved and went on with his enthusiasm.

There were to be twenty-four races, all of four-horse chariots only, twelve in the morning, of six chariots, one for each of the racing companies; twelve in the afternoon, of twelve chariots, two for each of the racing companies. Colgius discoursed at length as to his opinions concerning the six companies, inveighing against the Golds and the Crimsons, declaring that they were rich men's companies, in which only senators and nobles took any interest and the existence of which spoiled racing.

"You never heard of a plain man like me betting on the Crimson or the Gold," he ranted, "all folks of moderate means, all the plain people, all the populace, bet on the Reds, Whites, Greens or Blues. I agree that the Greens are the most popular company, most popular with all classes from the senators and nobles to the poorest, but I will never admit, as many claim, that the Blues have the second place in the affections of the people; the Blues, I maintain, come third and the Reds have second place with all classes. The Whites are a strong fourth. But, as to the Golds and the Crimsons, no one ever lays a wager on them except the enormously rich nobles and senators whose ancestors organized them under Domitian a hundred years ago. But they, being so enormously rich, can buy the best horses and have the best jockeys. Now they have Palus. The Reds have Scopas and the Greens Diocles, and both have been wonderful, but Palus can beat anybody.

"They say he has wagered an enormous sum that he will win all of the twelve races in which he is to run, the first six odd numbers and the last six even numbers, and that he will do so in a previously specified way; that he will take and keep first place in the first race; that, in the others he will, at the start, take second place, third place and so on progressively further back in each, till he lets the whole of five get ahead of him in the eleventh race and the whole field of eleven have the start of him in the last race."

Colgius was afraid Palus would succeed in doing precisely what he purposed. The Reds, if they won any races, must win in those in which Palus did not start. He judged they

could not hope to win more than eight of those twelve. He was gloomy.

Next day dawned fair, mild, and with a gentle breeze, perfect weather for spending a day in the Circus. To this Agathemer and I looked forward with some trepidation, for service men, spies and informers were always in all parts of the Circus and one might recognize me. But we comforted ourselves with the hope that they were no longer on the lookout for me. If I knew the ways of secret-service men I conjectured that they would never have been willing to report the truth: that they could find no trace of me, that I had vanished utterly and completely. I would have been willing to wager that, within a month of my disappearance, some corpse somewhere was identified as mine and my suicide reported as verified; which report had probably been accepted at the Palace; whereafter I would be off the minds of all secret-service men everywhere. Therefore I felt reasonably sure that no agent would be on the lookout for me. Of course there was a chance that one might recognize me by accident. But this was so unlikely that we did not worry over it much.

I was more concerned for fear of arousing suspicion in Colgius by not behaving as he would expect a Gallic Provincial to behave at his first sight of the great games in the Circus Maximus. I could not be sure at what he would expect me to exclaim, what I ought to wonder at and remark on to seem natural in my assumed role of Marseilles scapegrace.

We were a party of eight, Colgius, his wife Posilla, and two teamsters or drovers named Ramnius and Uttius, who conveyed goods or convoyed cattle between Ostia and the markets of Rome. They had their wives with them, but I forget their names. The three women were arrayed in wonderful costumes of cheap fabrics dyed in gaudy hues and adorned with jewelry of gilt or silvered bronze set with bits of colored glass. I had seen such at a distance, but never so close.

Both Agathemer and I liked Ramnius and Uttius; we felt at ease with them at first sight. And they were evidently intimates of Colgius and high in his favor. He and they

wore their togas with all the awkwardness to be expected from men who donned togas only for Circus games and Amphitheatre shows. To my amazement I found myself really delighted at again wearing a toga. Like all gentlemen I had always loathed the hot, heavy things. But I found myself positively thrill at being again garbed as befits a Roman on a holiday or at a ceremonial. Besides I found that a toga, over a poor man's tunic, was not nearly so uncomfortable as it was over the more complicated garb of a fashionable person of means and position.

The interior of the Circus, from my novel location, appeared sufficiently strange to lull my dread that I might seem too familiar with it. Of course we were very far back, only five rows in front of the arcade, whereas as long as I was a nobleman of Rome in good standing, I had always sat in the second tier, far forward.

But what made much more difference than sitting far back and high up instead of well forward and low down was that we were on the other side of the Circus from my old seat and almost directly opposite it. I had always sat in section E, about the middle of the east side of the Circus and not far from the Imperial Pavilion in section C. We were in section P, directly facing E, and not far from the judges' stand in section O.

Now from where I had been used to sitting, facing a little south of west, I had viewed only the tiers of seats and of spectators, the upper arcade, and, above that the roofs of the not very lofty, large or magnificent temples on the Aventine Hill. From where we sat with Colgius we faced the Palatine and I was overwhelmed by the vastness, beauty and grandeur of the great mass of buildings which make up the Imperial Palace. On a festival day, of course, they were exceptionally gorgeous, for every window was garlanded at the top and most displayed tapestries or rugs hung over the sill, every balcony was decorated similarly and with greater care than the windows, and every window, balcony and portico was a mass of eager faces. Especially my eye was caught by the crowd of Palace officials and servants on

the bulging loggia built by Hadrian in order to be able to catch glimpses of games when he was too busy to occupy the Imperial Pavilion in the Circus itself. That Pavilion, as yet occupied only by a few guards, I gazed at with mixed feelings.

Colgius put Agathemer next him, then me; beyond me sat Ramnius and his wife and then Uttius and his. But across Posilla we were introduced to two cattle inspectors named Clitellus and Summanus of whom we felt uncomfortably suspicious from the instant we laid eyes on them. They looked to me like secret-service agents and Agathemer nodded towards them, when they were not looking, raised his eyebrows and touched his lips.

I for some time satiated myself with gazing at the Palace, with admiring the wonderful charm of the outlook from this side of the Circus, with revelling in the sense of delight at being again in it, with feasting my eyes on its gorgeousness, on the magnificence of its vastness, of its colonnade, of its costly marbles, of its tiers of seats, of the obelisks, shrines, monuments and other decorations of the *spina*.

Then, after the upper seats were well packed with commonality, the gentry and nobility began to dribble into the lower tiers and even a few senatorial parties entered their boxes in the front row. I began to peer at party after party, outwardly trying to keep my face blank, inwardly excited at the probability of recognizing many former friends and acquaintances.

The first man I recognized was Faltonius Bambilio, unmistakably pompous and self-satisfied. Although a senator he came early. Later I saw Vedius Vedianus and, far from him, Satronius Satro. Didius Julianus, always the most ostentatious of the senators, was unmistakable even in section B, further from me than any part of the Circus except the left hand starting stalls and their neighborhood.

I looked for Tanno in section D, and early made him out.

But, even after the equestrian seats and senatorial boxes had all filled, nowhere could I descry any feminine shape at all suggestive of Vedia. I was still peering and sweeping

the senatorial seats with my eyes, hoping to espy her, when the bugles announced the Emperor's approach and the audience stood up. My eyes were on the Imperial Dais watching for the appearance of the Emperor. But when he came into sight, and I joined in the cheers, I viewed without emotion this man, who had honored me with his favor, yet who had credited to the utmost, without investigation, my inclusion among the number of his dangerous enemies. I reflected that no man accused of participating in a conspiracy against any Prince of the Republic had ever been given any sort of hearing or his friends allowed to try to clear him.

I used all my powers of eyesight to con the Emperor, distinctive in his official robes but too far off to be seen well. He appeared to me to have lost something of his elegance of carriage and grace of movement. He seemed less elastic in bearing, less springy of gait. There was, even at that distance, something familiar in his attitude and stride, but it did not seem precisely the presence of Commodus as I had known him. I stared puzzled and groping in my mind. But I felt no emotion as I stared and peered at him.

Oddly enough, from the moment when I received Vedia's letter of warning until I caught sight of the head of the procession about to enter the Circus through the Procession gate, I had had not one instant of despondency or of self-pity. But, at sight of the head of that magnificent procession, a sort of wave of misery surged through me and inundated me with a sudden sense of wistful regret for all that I had lost and also with an acute realization of the precarious hold I had on life, of the peril I was in from hour to hour. This unexpected and unwelcome dejection possessed me until the whole line of floats displaying the images of the gods had passed and the racing chariots came along.

The very first of these drawn by a splendid team of four dapple grays, was driven by a charioteer wearing the colors of the Crimsons' Company. I did not need to hear the exclamation of Colgius:

"There is Palus! That is Palus!" to recognize this Prince of Charioteers. The descriptions I had heard were enough

to have told me who he was. For at even a distant sigh of him I did not wonder at the tales which gave out tha he was a half brother of Commodus, or Commodus in dis guise. He was more like Commodus than any half brothe would have been likely to have been; like as a twin brother like enough to be actually Commodus himself. He had al Commodus' comeliness of port and refinement of poise Every attitude, every movement, was a joy to behold. stared back and forth from this paragon in a charioteer' tunic to the stolid lump on the Imperial throne, perplexe at the enigma, feeling just on the verge of comprehension but baffled. I kept gazing from one to the other till Palu rounded the further goal and was largely hidden by the post the stand for the bronze tally-eggs, the obelisk and the othe ornaments of the *spina*.*

There were about two hundred chariots, for very few team were entered to race twice. More than a third were drive by charioteers, the rest by grooms, or others, quite competen to control them at a walk, though some of the more fier had also men on foot holding their bits.

"Felix," Agathemer queried, "did you notice anything pe culiar about the first chariot?"

"Yes, Asper," I replied, "I did. I never saw a chario with its wheels so close together, nor with such long spokes Its axle is higher from the ground than any I ever set eye on."

"I recall," said Agathemer, "hearing you recount a lectur on chariot-design you once heard from a man of lofty sta tion."

"The design of that chariot," I replied, "certainly tallie with the design advocated in that lecture. It would seem to indicate that Palus has accepted the views of that very distinguished lecturer."

"Perhaps," said Agathemer drily. "Perhaps it indicate something more notable."

"Perhaps," I admitted.

Most of the teams were white or dapple gray, those being the favorite colors of all the racing companies except th

* See Note G.

Whites themselves, among whom it was a tradition that teams of their racing-colors were unlucky for them. Next most frequent were bays, then sorrels, while roans and piebalds, as usual, were distinctly scarce. In fact there were but three teams of roans, all with the white colors, and two of piebalds, one belonging to the Greens and one to the Blues. The Blue team caught my eye, even at so great a distance. When it came opposite us I nudged Agathemer and queried:

"Asper, did you ever see any of these horses before?"

"Yea, Felix," he replied. "You are quite right in your judgment; the left-hand yoke-mate is the very stallion you are thinking of, which you and I have seen and handled before to-day. You and I know where you rode him and how he passed out of your ken."

It was, in fact, the trick stallion, I had ridden at Reate fair and won as a prize of my riding him, which had been spirited away from my stables not many nights after he came into my possession. At once I foresaw some attempt at altogether unusual trickery in the course of this racing-day. The team of four splendid piebald stallions, about five years old, was one of the few entered for two races. I could not conjecture how a horse which had spent his youth as trick-horse in possession of an itinerant fakir, had acquired, since I knew him, reputation enough to be yoke-mate in a team highly enough thought of to be entered for two races the same day in the Circus Maximus. This was a puzzle almost as absorbing as the likeness and contrast between the Emperor and Palus.

The racing had many remarkable features, but I am concerned to relate only those in which Palus took part.

At once after the procession he drove in the first race, always a perilous honor. When we saw the chariots dart out of the starting-stalls, the Crimson emerged from the stall furthest to the left, just that which is the worst possible position from which to start. Although thus handicapped the Crimson seemed a horse-length ahead before the other chariots had cleared the sills of their stalls and a full chariot-length ahead before it reached the near end of the *spina*

wall. We saw Palus take the wall easily and hold it throughout the race, after the first turn never less than two full chariot-lengths ahead of the Green, which came second. The Red was third, which comforted Colgius a little. As Palus passed the judges' stand he threw up an arm, with a gesture so boyish, so debonair, so graceful, so altogether characteristic of Commodus, that I felt a qualm all over me. And a second gesture of exultation as he vanished through the Gate of Triumph was equally individual.

The Red won the second race, which put Colgius, Uttius and Ramnius in high good humor and seemed to make their fat, smiling wives even more smiling.

Agathemer and I agreed that the rumors retailed by Colgius concerning the wager said to have been made by Palus were probably correct; for he did just what that rumor specified and so singular and spectacular a series of feats could hardly have been fortuitous. It was quite plain that he pulled in his team in the third race, and let a Gold team get the lead of him and keep it till five eggs and five dolphins had been taken down by the tally-keepers' menials and there were but two full laps to run. Then he took the lead easily in the middle of the straight and won by four full lengths.

So of the other races in which he drove. He pulled in his team at the start and each time allowed to get ahead of him one more team than in his last race. Then he joyously and without apparent effort passed first one, in one straight, then another in another, varying his methods from race to race, watching for and seizing his opportunities, biding his time, dashing into top speed as he chose, all smoothly and in perfect form.

The Blue team of piebalds with my trick-stallion among them won the fourth race in which Palus did not compete.

The eleventh race, in which Palus let the whole field of five precede him, was most exciting, especially because of the length of lead he gave even to the fifth team, and the impression of inevitableness about his victory afterwards. The thirteenth, in which he did not drive, was notable for an appalling smash-up of five chariots, in which three jockeys

were killed and eight horses killed outright or so badly injured that the clearing-crew had to put them out of their agonies.

The fourteenth race would have been spoiled by an even worse massacre had it not been for the superlative skill of Palus and his amazing luck. He had passed five of the seven chariots which had the lead of him at the start and was a close third to the two Blue teams, with the entire field well up behind, three abreast, mostly, bunched up in a fashion which seldom happens. The whole dozen had gathered way after the tenth turn, as they came up the straight past the judges and us on the first lap, while two eggs and two dolphins still remained on the tally stands. Two thirds up the straight, just when all twelve teams were at their top speed, the Blue chariot furthest out from the *spina* wall swerved to the right as if the jockey had lost control of his team. Palus lashed his four and they increased their speed as if they had been held in before and darted between the two Blues. As the twelve horses were nose to nose the outer Blue pulled sharply inward in a way which appeared certain to pocket Palus and wreck his team and chariot, but even more certain to wreck the swerving Blue. What Palus did I was too far off to see, but the roar of delight from the front rows, which spread north, south and west till it sounded like surf in a tempest, advertised that he had done something superlatively adequate. Certainly he slipped between the two Blue teams and won his race handily, as he did every other in succession, though eight, nine, ten and eleven chariots led him at the start of each in succession.

"What do you think of that, Asper?" I asked Agathemer.

"Felix," he replied, "there has never been but one man on earth who could manage horses like that. I've seen him do it. I've been smuggled in to watch him, like many another servant supposed to be waiting for his master outside. I recognize the inimitable witchery of him."

"No need to name him," I said. "But if you are right, who is wearing his robes and occupying his usual seat to-day?"

"Don't ask me!" Agathemer replied. "But you yourself, Felix, who have seen him drive so much oftener than I have must agree with me about Palus."

I was mute.

I never saw a better managed racing-day. The first twelve races of six chariots each were over and done with more than an hour before noon and we had plenty of time to eat the abundant lunch Posilla and her two friends had put up for us, to drink all we wanted of the wine served in the tavern in the vault to the left of the entrance stair, underneath the seats of our section, and to return to our seats, refreshed like the rest of that fraction of the spectators which went out and came back, most of them sitting tight in their seats, unwilling to miss any of the tight-rope-walking, jugglers' tricks, fancy riding and rest of the diversions which filled up the noon interval. Also the twelve afternoon races of twelve chariots each were so promptly started, with so little interval between, that the last race was run a full two hours before sunset, while the light was still strong; stronger, in fact, than earlier in the day, for a sort of film of cloud had mitigated the glare of noon, while by the start of the last race the sky was the deepest, clearest blue and the sun's radiance undimmed by any hindrance.

That last race! Palus passed nine competitors in ten half laps, and, in the first half of the sixth lap, was again third to two Blue teams one of which was the piebald team with the Reate trick-stallion as left-hand yoke-mate. Again, as in the fourteenth race, the field was close up, widespread, bunched, and thundering at top speed. Palus was driving the dapple grays with which he had won the first race.

Now, what happened, happened much quicker than it can be told, happened in the twinkling of an eye. The inner leading Blue team apparently hugged the *spina* wall too close and jammed its left-hand hub-end against the marble, stopping the chariot, so that the axle and pole slewed and so that the horses, since the pole and the traces did not snap, were brought nose on against the wall and piled up horridly, just at the goal-line, opposite the judges stand, and falling so

that as they fell they straightened out the pole and brought the chariot to a standstill with its axle neatly across the course.

The other Blue, with the piebalds, was not close in to the leaders, but fairly well out and about a length behind. As the wall-team piled up something happened among the free-running piebalds. Of course, I conjecture that the trick-stallion threw himself sideways at a signal. But it seems incredible that a creature as timid as a horse, so compellingly controlled by the instinct to keep on its feet, should, in the frenzy of the crisis of a race, while in the mad rush of a full-speed gallop, obey a signal so out of variance with his natural impulse. Agathemer vows he saw the trick-stallion throw himself against the chief horse while he and the other two were running strong and true. I did not see that; I only saw the four piebalds go down in a heap in front of their chariot, saw the chariot stop dead, saw, even at that distance, that its axle was perfectly in line with the axle of the other wrecked chariot, both chariots right side up and too close together for any chariot to pass between them.

Palus, skimming the sand not three horse lengths behind the piebalds, was trapped and certain to be piled up against the wrecked Blues, under three or four more of the field thundering behind him.

Actually, at that distance, I saw his pose, the very outline of his neck and shoulders, express not alarm but exultation. Although his right ear and part of the back of his head was towards me, I could almost see him yell. I could descry how the lash of his whip flew over his team, how craftily he managed his reins.

Right at the narrow gap he drove. In it his horses did not jam or fall or stumble or jostle. The yoke-mates held on like skimming swallows, the trace-mates seemed to rise into the air. I seemed to see the two wheels of his chariot interlock with the two wheels of the upright, stationary wrecked chariots, his left-hand wheel between the chariot-body and right-hand wheel of the chariot on his left, his right-

hand wheel between the chariot-body and left-hand wheel of the chariot on his right.

Certainly I saw his chariot, with him erect in it, rise in the air, saw it bump on the ground beyond the two stationary chariots, saw it leap up again from its wheels' impact upon the sand, all four of his dapple grays on their feet and running smoothly, saw him speed on and round the upper goal-posts.

As Palus came round the next lap, well ahead of the diminished field, he craftily avoided the heap of wreckage. As he won he dropped his reins altogether, threw up both arms, and yelled like a lad. As he vanished through the Triumphal Gateway, he again dropped his reins, left his team to guide themselves, and turned half round to wave an exultant farewell to the spectators.

"What do you think, Asper?" I asked Agathemer.

"Felix," said he, "I wouldn't bet a copper that the occupant of the throne is not Commodus. But I'll wager my amulet-bag and all it contains that Palus is not Ducconius Furfur."

He said it under his breath, that I alone might hear.

"My idea, precisely, Asper," I replied.

CHAPTER XXI

MISADVENTURES

AS we left the Circus I heard in the crowd near us, along with fierce denunciations of the Crimsons and Golds, execrated by all the commonality as merely rich men's companies, the most enthusiastic laudations of Palus and expressions of hopes that the Blues, Greens, Reds or Whites, according to the preference of the speaker, might yet win him over and benefit by his prowess.

Colgius, although the Reds had won but five races, was in a high good humor and insisted on the whole party coming

in to a family dinner. The three wives occupied the middle sofa, while Agathemer and I had the upper all to ourselves. The fare was abundant and good, with plenty of the cheaper relishes to begin with; roast sucking-pig, cold sliced roast pork, baked ham, and veal stew for the principal dishes, with cabbage, beans and lentils; the wine was passable, and there was plenty of olives, figs, apples, honey and quince marmalade.

The women talked among themselves and the men, with us putting in a word now and then, of Palus. They argued a long time as to just what he did in the fourteenth race and how he had saved himself at the critical moment. As to his victory in the last race, all three of them were loud in their praises. Colgius said:

"Nothing like that has ever happened before. The chariot which Palus drove had the shortest axle I ever saw or anybody else. No other chariot but that could have passed between the two wrecked chariots; any other would have crashed its two wheels against the wrecked chariot-bodies and would have smashed to bits. His chariot was so narrow that its wheels passed between the two chariot-bodies, clear.

"Even so any other chariot would have stopped dead when its wheels hit the axles of the stalled chariots, for it was plain that his wheels interlocked with the wheels of the stalled chariots and hit the axles. But his chariot had the longest spokes ever seen in Rome, or, I believe, anywhere else, and so had the tallest wheels ever seen and had its axle higher above the sand than any other chariot; so its wheels engaged the stalled axles well below their hub-level and so the team pulled them right over the axles and on."

"Yes," said Uttius, "but that never would have happened but for Palus' instantaneous grasp of the situation and lightning decision. Any other charioteer would have reined in or tried to swing round to the right; he lashed his team and guided them so perfectly that, with not a hand's-breadth to spare anywhere, the two wheels passed precisely where there was the only chance of their passing, and he guided his horses so perfectly that the yoke-mates shot between the stalled

wheels without jostling them or each other. No man has ever displayed such skill as Palus."

"Nor had such luck," Ramnius cut in. "No man could have guided the yoke-mates as he did and, at the same time, exerted any influence whatever on the trace-mates. They showed their breed. Each saw the stalled wheel in front of him, neither tried to dodge. Each went straight at that wheel, reared at it, and leapt it clean. As they leapt they were not helping to pull the chariot, the yoke-mates pulled it over the stalled axles. But the momentary check as the chariot hit the axles and leapt up gave the leaping trace-mates just the instant of time they needed to find their feet and regain their stride. The whole thing was a miracle; of training, of skill and of luck."

"But don't forget," said Colgius, "that the skill and judgment Palus displayed counted for more than the breed of his team and his luck. Do not forget the perfect form he showed: not an awkward pose, not a sign of effort, not a hint of anxiety; self-possession, courage, self-confidence all through and the most perfect grace of movement, ease, and suggestion of reserve strength. He is a prodigy."

After Agathemer and I were alone in the dark on our cots we whispered to each other a long time.

"Do you really believe," I said, "that Commodus is so insane about horse-racing as to be willing to put Furfur on his throne in his robes so that he can degrade himself under the name of Palus?"

"I do," said Agathemer. "No other conjecture fits what we saw. The man on the throne was certainly the image of Commodus, but had not his elegance of port and grace of movement. Palus has all the inimitable gracefulness which Commodus displayed when driving teams in the Palace Stadium."

"He is incredibly stupid in undervaluing and failing to prize his privileges as Emperor," I said, "and amazingly reckless in allowing anyone else to occupy his throne, wearing his robes."

"He is yet more reckless to race as he does," Agathemer

commented, "and I should not be astonished if we have seen his last public appearance as a charioteer."

"Why?" I queried startled.

"Because," said Agathemer, "he must be incredibly stupid not to perceive, now, what opportunities the Circus offers for getting rid of an Emperor posing as a charioteer.

"A stupider man than Commodus can possibly be should be able to comprehend that there must have been a very carefully planned plot in the Blue Company, a plot which must have cost a mountain of gold to carry so far towards success, a plot which never would have been laid for a mere jockey, however much his rivalry threatened the Company's winnings and prestige. Only a coterie of very wealthy men could have devised and pushed it. It cost money to induce charioteers to come so close to almost certain death in order to compass the destruction of another charioteer. It cost money to sacrifice a company's teams in that fashion. Such a plot was never laid to get rid of Palus the jockey; it was aimed at ridding the nobility of an Emperor they fear and hate, however popular he may be with the commonality.

"I miss my guess if there is not a violent upheaval in the Blue Company, and if there is not an investigation scrutinizing the behavior and loyalty of every man affiliated with them, from their board of managers down to the stall-leaners. I prophesy that the informers, spies and secret-service men will have fat pickings off the Blues for many a day to come. I'll bet the guilty men are putting their affairs in order now and hunting safe hiding-places. Commodus may be insane about horse-racing and fool enough to put a dummy Emperor in his place, so he can be free to enjoy jockeying, but he is no fool when it comes to attempts at assassination. He'll run down the guilty or exterminate them among a shoal of innocents."

I agreed.

But I added:

"What is the world coming to when the Prince of the Republic prizes his privileges so little that he neglects state business for horse-jockeying, when he is so crazy over char-

ioteering that he lets another man wear his robes and occupy his throne? It is a mad world."

Next morning we were early on Orontides' ship and once more Agathemer charmed a crew with his flageolet.

At Ostia Orontides found he must lay over for some valuable packages consigned to a jeweler at Antioch for the conveyance of which he was highly paid. He suggested that, as the day was hot for so late in the year, we go ashore and see the sights which, indeed, we found well worth seeing, for Ostia has some buildings outmatching anything to be found outside of Rome. We took his hint, but he warned us:

"I have some sailors I don't trust. Don't leave anything aboard. Take your wallets with you."

We passed a pleasant, idle day, lunching and taking our siesta at an inn outside the Rome Gate. We had planned to dine at an inn near the harbor-front, on the west side of the town, not far from the Sea Gate: there we had barely sat down and begun tasting the relishes, when in came Clitellus and Summanus. They seemed surprised and pleased to recognize us, greeted us as if we had been old friends and close intimates, appeared to assume that we were as glad to see them as they were to see us, and, as a matter of course, joined us at dinner, telling the waiter-boy to bring them whatever we had ordered, only doubling the quantity of every order.

They talked of the races we had seen, of Palus, of his driving; of the smash-ups, of Posilla, of Colgius and of everything and anything. They announced that they would accompany us to our ship and see us safe aboard. Both Agathemer and I more than suspected that they had associates in waiting to follow them and, at a signal, fall on us and seize us. I felt all that and Agathemer whispered to me a word or two in Greek which advised me of his suspicions.

We prolonged our meal all we could, but there was no shaking them off. Agathemer ordered more wine, Falernian, and had it mixed with only one measure of water. Watching his opportunity he threw at me, in a whisper, two Greek words which advised me, since they were the first in a well

known quotation from Menander, that our only hope was to drink our tormentors dead drunk.

It turned out to be a question whether we would drink them drunk or they us. Certainly they showed no hesitation about pouring down the wine as fast as it was mixed and served, nor did either of them appear to notice that we drank less than they; they seemed able to hold any amount and stay sober and keep on drinking. As dusk deepened and the waiter-boys lit the inn lamps, I found myself perilously near sliding off my chair to the floor and very doubtful whether, if I did, I should be able to get up again or to resist my tendency to go to sleep then and there.

I was, in fact, just about to give up any attempt to resist my impulse to collapse when Summanus collapsed, slid to the floor, rolled over, spread out and snored.

Clitellus thickly objurgated his comrade and all weakheads, worthless fellows who could not drink a few goblets without getting drunk. To prove his vast superiority and his prowess, he poured more wine down his throat, spilling some down into his tunic.

Agathemer winked at me and fingered the strap of his wallet. I groped for mine and fumbled at it.

Clitellus, with a hiccough, slid to the floor beside Summanus.

I was for trying to rise.

"Let us be sure," said Agathemer in Greek, "perhaps they are pretending to be drunk, just to catch us."

But, after a brief contemplation of the precious pair, we concluded that no acting could be as perfect as this reality. They were drunk at last and safely asleep.

Agathemer paid the whole amount for all four of us, adjured the waiter-boy to be good to Clitellus and Summanus, gave him an extra coin, and signalled me to rise. I lurched to my feet, swaying, almost as drunk as our victims and beholding Agathemer swaying before me, not only because of my blurred eyesight, but also because of his unsteadiness on his feet.

We almost fell, but not quite. Somehow we staggered to

the door, where, once outside, the cool night air made u feel almost sobered, though still too nearly drunk to be sur of our location or direction.

More by luck than anything else we took the right tur and found the harbor front before the night was entirel black. In the half gloom we tried to find the pier fro which we had come that morning. As we explored we hear a cheerful hail.

"Is that you, Orontides?"

Agathemer called.

"Aye, Aye!" came back the cheery answer. "Com aboard!"

And we were met and assisted up the gang-plank and dow over the bulwarks.

"I was afraid you boys were lost," the shipmaster sai "and I am to sail at dawn, after all; everything is aboar I'm glad to see you. You've dined pretty liberally. Com over here and get to sleep."

And he led us to where we found something soft to slee on.

I was asleep almost as soon as I lay down.

I awoke with a terrific headache and an annoying buzzin in my ears, awoke only partially, not knowing where I wa or why and without any distinct recollections of recen events. My first sensation was discomfort, not only from th pain of my headache, but also from the heat of the sunray beating on me, and that despite the fact that I could fe a strong cool breeze ruffling my hair and beard.

I sat up and looked about me. Agathemer was snorin The sun was not low; in fact, at that time of the year, was near its highest. I had slept till noon!

Then, all of a sudden I realized that the ship was wholl strange to me and that it was headed not southeast, bu northwest. That realization shocked me broad awake. A the same instant I saw the shipmaster approaching. H was not Orontides, nor was he at all like him. He ha small feet, was knock-kneed, tall, lean, had a hatchet-fac and red hair.

"Awake at last!" he commented. "You lads must have dined gloriously last night. You don't look half yourselves, yet."

He stared at me, and at Agathemer, who had waked, into much the same sort of daze in which I had been at first.

"Neptune's trident!" the shipmaster exclaimed. "You two aren't the two lads I was to convoy! Who are you and how did you get here?"

"We were hunting for our ship after dark," Agathemer said, "and somebody hailed us. We asked whether it was Orontides and the answer that came back was: 'Aye, Aye!' We were pretty thoroughly drunk and were glad to be helped aboard and shown our beds. That's all I know."

"Kingdom of Pluto!" the shipmaster cried, "my name's Gerontides, not Orontides. I heard your question, but you were so drunk I never knew the difference: probably I shouldn't have known the difference if you had been sober. I was on the lookout for two lads much like you two who had part paid me to carry them to Genoa. They'll be in a fix."

"'Bout ship," said Agathemer, "and put back to Ostia. You can't be far on your way yet. We'll pay you what you ask to set us ashore at Ostia."

"I wouldn't 'bout ship," said Gerontides, "for twenty gold pieces."

"We'll pay you thirty," said Agathemer.

"Don't bid any higher, son," Gerontides laughed. "If you were made of gold, to Genoa you go. I've a bigger stake in a quick landing at Genoa than any sum you could name would overbalance. Best be content!"

And content we had to be, no arguments, no entreaties, nothing would move him.

"I'll be fair with you," he said. "The lads I took you for had paid me all I had asked them except one gold piece each on landing at Genoa. That's all you'll have to pay me."

Nothing would budge him from his resolution. Agathemer in despair drowned his misery in flageolet playing. It seemed to comfort him and certainly comforted me. The crew were delighted. After a voyage as easy and pleasant

as our cruise with Maganno, we landed on the eighth day before the Ides of September, at Genoa, paid our two gold pieces and set about getting out of that city as quickly as might be. We avoided, of course, the posting-station where we had changed horses while in couriers' trappings. But there was a posting-station at each gate of Genoa and we, having talked over all possibilities in the intervals of flageolet playing, were for Dertona. We had little trouble in buying a used travelling-carriage. Horses we did not have to wait long for, as hiring teams were luckily plentiful that day and Imperial agents scarce. Off we set for Milan.

We were in haste but there was no hurrying postillions on those mountain roads. We nooned at some nameless change-house and were glad to make the thirty-six miles to Libarium by dusk. The next day was consumed in covering the thirty-five miles to Dertona. From there on we travelled, in general down hill, and so quicker, but not much quicker, so that a third day entire was needed for making the fifty-one miles to Placentia.

Placentia, a second time, was unlucky for us. It might have been worse, for we did not again encounter Gratillus, or anyone else who might have recognized me. But I made a fool of myself. I am not going to tell what happened; Agathemer never reproached me for my folly, not even in our bitterest misery; but I reproached myself daily for nearly three years; I am still ashamed of myself and I do not want to set down my idiotic behavior.

Let it suffice, that, through no fault of Agathemer's, but wholly through my fault, we were suspected, interrogated, arrested, stripped, our brand-marks and scourge-scars observed and ourselves haled before a magistrate. To him Agathemer told the same tale he had told to Tarrutenus Spinellus. It might have served had we been dealing with a man of like temper, for travellers from Ancona for Aquileia regularly passed through Placentia turning there from northwest along the road from Ancona to northeast along the road to Aquileia.

But Stabilius Norbanus was a very different kind of man.

"Your story may be true," he said, "but it impresses me as an ingenious lie. If I believed it I'd not send men like you, with their records written in welts on their backs, with any convoy, no matter how strict, on the long journey to Aquileia, on which you'd have countless opportunities of escape. I do not believe your tale. Yet I'll pay this much attention to it: I'll write to Vedius Aquileiensis and ask him if he owned two slaves answering your descriptions and lost them through unexplained disappearance or known crimping by Dalmatian pirates at about the time you indicate.

"Meantime I'll commit you to an *ergastulum*,* where you'll be herded with your kind, all safely chained, so that no escape is possible, and all doing some good to the state by some sort of productive labor. A winter at the flour-mills will do you two good."

Our winter at the mills may have benefited us, but it was certainly, with its successor at similar mills, one of the two most wretched winters of my life. And Agathemer, I think, suffered every bit as acutely as I. We were not chained, except for a few days and about twice as many more nights; as soon as the manager of the *ergastulum* felt that he knew us he let us go unchained like the rest of his charges.

This was because of the structure of the *ergastulum*. It was located in the cellars of one of the six or more granaries of Placentia, which has, near each city gate, an extensive public store-house. The granary under which we were immured was that near the Cremona gate. Above ground it was a series of rectangles about courtyards each just big enough to accommodate four carts, all unloading or loading at once. It was everywhere of four stories of bin-rooms, all built of coarse hard-faced rubble concrete. The cellars were very extensive, and not all on one level, being cunningly planned to be everywhere about the same depth underground. Where their floor-levels altered the two were joined by short flights of three, four or five stone steps, under a vaulted doorway, in the thick partition walls.

* See Note H.

Each cellar-floor was about four yards below the ground level so that a tall man, standing on a tall man's shoulders, could barely reach with his outstretched fingers the tip of the sill of one of the low windows. These windows, each about a yard high and two yards broad, were heavily barred with gratings of round iron bars as thick as a man's wrist, set too close together for a boy's head to pass between them, and each two bars hot-welded at each intersection, so that each grating was practically one piece of wrought iron, made before the granary was built and with the ends of each bar set deep in the flinty old rubble concrete. The inmates need not be chained, as no escape was possible through the windows, though raw night air, rain, snow at times and the icy winter blasts came in on us through them.

Similarly no escape was possible up the one entrance to the cellars, which was through an inner courtyard, from which led down a stone stair with four sets of heavy doors; one at the bottom, one at each end of a landing lighted by a heavily barred window, and one at the top. Between the inner and outer courtyard were two sets of heavier doors and two equally heavy were at the street entrance of the outer courtyard. On the stair-landing was the chained-up porter-accountant seated under the window on a backless stool by a small, heavy accountant's table on which stood a tall *clepsydra* by his big account-book. Checking the hours by the *clepsydra,* he entered the name of every human being passing, up or down that stair, even the name of the manager every time he came in or went out. By him always stood a wild Scythian, armed with a spear, girt with a sabre, and with a short bow and a quiver of short arrows hanging over his back. Similar Scythians guarded the doorways, a pair of them to each door. The slide by which the grain was lowered into the *ergastulum,* the other slide by which the flour, coarse siftings and bran were hauled up, were similarly guarded. Escape was made so difficult by these precautions that, while I was there, no one escaped out of the three hundred wretches confined in the *ergastulum.*

There we suffered sleepless nights in our hard bunks,

under worn and tattered quilts, tormented by every sort of vermin. Swarming with vermin we toiled through the days, from the first hint of light to its last glimmer, shivering in our ragged tunics, our bare feet numb on the chilly pavements. We were cold, hungry, underfed on horribly revolting food, reviled, abused, beaten and always smarting from old welts or new weals of the whip-lashes.

It was all a nightmare: the toil, the lashings, if our monotonous walk around our mill, eight men to a mill, two to each bar, did not suit the notions of the room-overseer; the dampness, the cold, the vermin, the pain of our unhealed bruises, the scanty food and its disgusting uneatableness.

The food seemed the worst feature of our misery. So, in fact, it appears to have seemed to our despicable companions. Certainly, of the food they complained more than of the toil, the cold, the vermin, the malignity of the overseers or even of the barbarity of the Scythian guards. Anyhow their fury at the quality of their food brought to me and Agathemer an alleviation of our misery. For some hot-headed wretches, goaded beyond endurance, jerked the bars of their mill from their sockets and with them felled, beat to death and even brained the cook and his two assistants.

After their corpses had been removed, the floor swabbed up and the murderers turned over to the gloating Scythians to be done to death by impalement, Scythian fashion, with all the tortures Scythian ferocity could devise, the manager went from cellar to cellar, all through the *ergastulum,* enquiring if any prisoner could cook. No one volunteered, and, when he questioned more than a few, everyone denied any knowledge of cookery.

A second time he made the tour of his domain, promising any cook a warm tunic, a bunk with a thick mattress and two heavy quilts, all the food he could eat and two helpers; the helpers to have similar indulgences. On this second round, in our cellar, a Lydian, nearer to being fat than any prisoner in the *ergastulum,* admitted that he could make and bake bread, but vowed that he could not do anything else connected with cooking. Spurred on by his confession and

tempted by the offers of better clothing and bedding and more food, also by the memories of Agathemer's cookery the winter before, I blurted out that Agathemer could not make bread, but could do everything else needed in cookery. Agathemer, after one reproachful glance at me, admitted that he was a cook of a sort, but declared that he was almost as bad a cook as the wretch just murdered. The overseer bade him go to the kitchen and told him he might select a helper; the baker would have been the other helper. As helper Agathemer, naturally, selected me.

After that we suffered less. The slaves acclaimed Agathemer's cooking; for, if their rations were still scanty by order of the watchful manager, at least their food was edible. Far from being ultimately killed, like our predecessors, and continually threatened and reviled, we were blessed by our fellow-slaves. We slept better, in spite of the vermin, on our grass-stuffed mattresses, under our foul quilts, we shivered less in our thicker tunics. We were not too tired to discuss, at times, the oddities of our vicissitudes, to congratulate each other on being, at least, alive, on my not being suspected of being what I actually was, and, above all, on the safety of our old, blackened, greasy, worthless-looking, amulet-bags, with their precious contents. To be reduced to carrying food to three hundred of the vilest rascals alive was a horrible fate for a man who had, two years before, been a wealthy nobleman, but it was far better than death as a suspected conspirator. And Agathemer was hopeful of our future, of survival, of escape, of comfort somewhere after he had sold another emerald, ruby, or opal. Nothing could, for any length of time, dim or cloud the light of Agathemer's buoyancy of disposition.

BOOK III

DIVERSITIES

CHAPTER XXII

THE MUTINEERS

OUR promotion from the mills to the kitchen took place early in March of the year when Manius Acilius Glabrio, after an interval of thirty-four years since his first consulship, was consul for the second time and had as nominal associate Commodus, preening himself, for the fifth time, on the highest office in the Republic, which he had done little to deserve, and while he held it, did less to justify himself in possessing, since he left most of the duties of the consulship to Glabrio, as he left most of the Principate to Perennis, his Prefect of the Prætorium. All of this, of course, we learnt later in the year; for, inside our prison, we knew nothing of what went on in Placentia, let alone of what went on in Italy and in Rome itself.

We had been cooking for more than three months, when, about the middle of June, our attention in the cellars was distracted from doling out food, as that of the wretches we served was distracted from eating their scanty rations, by an unusual uproar in the street outside of our windows. We could descry, in the morning sunlight, military trappings, tattered cloaks, ragged tunics, dingy kilt-straps, sheenless helmets, unkempt beards, and brawny arms in the crowds which packed the narrow streets. The mob seemed made up of rough frontier soldiery, and we marvelled at the presence of such men in Italy.

The uproar increased and we heard it not only from the streets but from the courtyards; we could not make out any words, but the tone of the tumultuous growls was menacing and imperative. After no long interval the doors at the foot of the one stair burst open and there entered to us three

centurions, indubitably from distant frontier garrisons, accompanied by six or seven *optiones** and a dozen or more legionaries. The privates and corporals stood silent while one of the three sergeants addressed us:

"No one shall be compelled to join us. Every man of you shall have his unforced choice. All who join us shall be free. Such as prefer to remain where they are sit down! All who select to join us stand up!"

If any man sat down I did not see him. Through the door we flowed without jostling or crowding, for at the first appearance of a tendency to push forward the sergeant's big voice bellowed a warning and order reigned. Up the stair we poured, passing on the landing the mute, motionless porter-accountant and his Scythian guard, cowed immobile between two burly frontier centurions; out into the courtyard we streamed, more and more following till the courtyard was packed. The whole movement was made in silence, without a cheer or yell, for, like the porter and the Scythians, the most unconscionable villains in our *ergastulum* quailed before the truculence of the frontier sergeants.

In the outer court, at the suggestion of one of those same centurions, every man of us drank his fill at the well-curb, pairs of the legionaries taking turns at hauling up the buckets and watering us, much as if we had been thirsty work-horses. After they had made sure that none had missed a chance to quench his thirst, they roughly marshalled us into some semblance of order and out into the street we trooped, where we found ourselves between two detachments of frontier soldiers, one filling the street ahead of us from house-wall to house-wall, the other similarly blocking the street behind us. Between them we were marched to the market-square, where we had plenty of room, for we had it all to ourselves, the soldiery having cleared it and a squad of them blocking the entrance of each street leading into it, so that the townsfolk were kept out and we herded among the frontier soldiery.

Their centurions, to the number of eighteen, stood together on the stone platform from which orators were accustomed

*See Note F.

to address or harangue such crowds as might assemble in the market-square. Before it we packed ourselves as closely as we could, eager to hear. About us idled the soldiery not occupied in guarding the approach to the square.

One of the sergeants made a speech to us, explaining our liberation and their presence in Placentia. He called us "comrades" and began his harangue with a long and virulent denunciation of Perennis, the Prefect of the Palace. Perennis, he declared, had been a slave of the vilest origin and had won his freedom and the favor of the Palace authorities and of the Emperor not by merit but by rank favoritism. He maintained that Perennis, as Prefect of the Palace, had gained such an ascendancy over Commodus that besides his proper duties as guardian of the Emperor's personal safety, surely a charge sufficiently heavy to burden any one man and sufficiently honorable to satisfy any reasonable man, his master had been enticed into entrusting to Perennis the management of the entire Empire, so that he alone controlled promotions in and appointments to the navy, army and treasury services. In this capacity, as sole minister and representative of the sovereign, Perennis had enriched himself by taking bribes from all from whom he could extort bribes. By his venality he had gone far towards ruining the navy and army, which were by now more than half officered by hopeless incompetents who had bought their appointments. As a result the legionaries garrisoning the lines along the Euphrates, the Carpathians, the Danube, the Rhine and the Wall, since they were badly led, had suffered undeserved mishandling from the barbarians attacking them; and even the garrisons of mountain districts like Armenia, Pisidia, and Lusitania had been mauled by the bands of outlaws. He instanced the rebellion of Maternus as a result of the incompetence and venality of Perennis.

Worse than this, he said, Perennis was plotting the Emperor's assassination and the elevation to the Principate of one of his two sons. This project of his, which he was furthering by astute secret machinations, had come to the knowledge of a loyal member of the Emperor's retinue. He

had written of it to a brother of his, Centurion * of the Thirteenth Legion, entitled "Victorious" and quartered on the Wall, along the northern frontier of Britain, towards the Caledonian Highlands. This letter had reached the quarters of the Thirteenth Legion late in September. Its recipient had at once communicated to his fellow-sergeants the horrible intimation which it contained. They had resolved to do all in their power to save their Prince by forestalling and foiling the treacherous Perennis. They had called a meeting of their garrison and disclosed their information to their men. The legionaries acclaimed their decision. Deputations set out east and west along the Wall and roused the other cohorts of the Thirteenth Legion and those of the Twenty-Seventh. From the Wall messengers galloped south to the garrisons throughout Britain. In an incredibly short time, despite the approach and onset of winter, they apprised every garrison in the island. Messengers from every garrison reached every garrison. So rapidly was mutual comprehension and unanimity established, so secretly did they operate, that on the Nones of January all the garrisons in Britain simultaneously mutinied, overpowered their unsuspecting officers, disclosed to them the reasons for their sedition, and invited them to join them. Of all the officers on the island only two hesitated to agree with their men. These, after some expostulation, were killed. The rest resumed their duties, if competent, or were relegated to civilian life, if adjudged incompetent.

The three most prominent legions in Britain, the Sixth, Thirteenth and Twentieth, each entitled, because of prowess displayed in past campaigns, to the appellation of "Victorious," selected the equivalent of a cohort apiece to unite into a deputation representing the soldiery of Britain collectively, to proceed to Rome, reveal to the Emperor his danger, save him, foil Perennis, and see to it that he was put to death. In pursuance of this plan the six centuries chosen by the Thirteenth Legion, about five hundred men, had set out southward from the Wall on the day before the Ides of January. Accomplishing the march of a hundred and thirty-five miles

* See Note D.

to Eburacum, in spite of deep snow and heavy snow-storms, in fourteen days, there they foregathered with the main body of the Sixth Legion and were joined by their six selected centuries. The twelve, some thousand picked men, accomplished the march of eighty-five miles to Deva in nine days, though hampered by terrible weather. There they were joined by the delegates of the Twentieth Legion. Together the fifteen hundred deputies made the march of two hundred and eighty miles to Ritupis by way of Londinium, in twenty-eight days. At Ritupis they took part in the festival of Isis, by which navigation was declared open for the year and navigation blessed. Next day, on the day before the Nones of March, they had sailed for Gaul and made the crossing in ten hours, without any hindrance from headwinds or bad weather.

From Gessoriacum they had tramped across Gaul, inducing to join them such kindred spirits as they encountered among the squads of recent levies being drilled at each large town preparatory to being forwarded to reinforce the frontier garrisons. These inexperienced recruits they had organized into centuries under sergeants elected by the recruits themselves from among themselves, which elective centurions had handily learnt their novel duties from instructions given by one or two veterans detailed to aid in drilling each new century. Before they reached Vapincum they had associated with them fresh comrades equalling themselves in number, equipped from town arsenals. With these they had crossed into Italy through the Cottian Alps.

At Segusio they had been told that, under the misrule of Perennis, the *ergastula* of Italy were filled, not half with runaway slaves, petty thieves, rascals, ruffians and outlaws, but mainly with honest fellows who had committed no crime, but had been secretly arrested and consigned to their prisons merely because they had incurred the displeasure of Perennis or of one of his henchmen, or had been suspected, however vaguely, of actions, words or even of unspoken opinions distasteful to him or to anyone powerful through him. Acting on that information they had been setting free the inmates

of *ergastula* in cities through which they had passed, such as Turin and Milan, and had formed from these victims two fresh centuries. They proposed that we join them and march with them to Rome to inform and rescue our Emperor and foil and kill Perennis.

Of course the liberated riffraff accepted this suggestion with enthusiasm and without a dissenting voice. We were divided into squads of convenient size and marched off to the near-by bathing establishments. In that to which Agathemer and I were led, we, with the rest of our squad, were told by the sergeant superintending us to strip. Our worn, tattered and lousy garments were turned over to the bath-attendants to be steamed and then disposed of as they might. We were thoroughly steamed and scrubbed, so that every man of us was freed from every sort of vermin. During our bath the centurion in charge of us unobtrusively inspected us individually and collectively. In the dressing-room of the bathing establishments, after we had been steamed, scrubbed, baked, and dried, we were clad in military tunics fetched from the town arsenal or its store-houses. Also we were provided with military boots of the coarsest and cheapest materials, made after the pattern usual for frontier regiments.

Outside the bath the watchful sergeant divided us into two squads, a larger and a smaller, the smaller made up of those who, like Agathemer and me, bore brands, and scourge-marks. In the market-square we were again herded together, surrounded by the British legionaries and now ourselves divided into those like me and Agathemer, who were marked as runaway slaves and the larger number who showed no marks of scourge or brand. From among the unmarked the frontier centurions picked out thirty whom they judged likely material for sergeants like themselves. These thirty they bade select from among themselves three. Then they set the three, an Umbrian and a Ligurian outlaw, and a Dalmatian pirate, along the front of the stone platform and asked us whether we would accept those three as our centurions. Two speakers, one a Venetian and the other an Insubrian Gaul, objected to the pirate. In his place we

were bidden to choose some other from the twenty-seven already selected by the sergeants. A second Umbrian outlaw was selected.

Then the centurions bade the newly-elected three to choose each one man in rotation, until they had made up for each the nucleus of a century from the unmarked men.

After the three new centuries were thus constituted, they asked them to decide whether they would accept as comrades and associates the residue of the inmates of our *ergastulum* who were marked plainly as runaway slaves. They voted overwhelmingly to accept us. Then the three new sergeants proceeded to choose us also into their centuries. The choosing was interrupted by a Ravenna Gaul, who called the attention of the assembly to the fact that Agathemer had been cook to the *ergastulum* and I his helper; similarly to the baker and his assistant. After some discussion it was unanimously voted that the baker and his helper be treated as any others of the liberated rascals, that the three new centurions draw lots which should have Agathemer for cook to his century and me for his helper, and that the other two centuries appoint cooks by lot unless cooks and helpers volunteered. Four of the brand-marked rabble at once volunteered.

After the last man had been selected and the British centurions had marshalled, inspected and approved the three new centuries thus constituted, we were marched off to the town arsenal and there equipped with corselets, strap-kilts, greaves; cloaks, helmets, shields, swords and spears; only Agathemer, I, and the four other cooks and helpers, were given no spears, shields, helmets or body-armour, only swords, jackets and caps.

Then, full-fledged tumultary legionaries, we were marshalled as well as greenhorns could be ranked and we marched from the market-place the length of the street leading to the Fidentia Gate. Outside it we found the semblance of a camping-ground and tents ready for us to set up. Up we set them, we new recruits, clumsily, under the jeers of the old-timers, to the tune of taunts and curses from the disgusted veteran centurions.

When the camp was set up a fire was made for each century and we cooks and helpers fell to our duties, with a squad of privates to cut wood, feed the fires, fetch water and do any other rough preparatory work, such as butchering a sheep or a goat, killing, picking and cleaning fowls, and what not. For this welcome, if clumsy, assistance we had to thank one of the British centurions, who admonished our newly-elected Umbrian sergeant that camp-cookery called for any needed number of assistant helpers to the chief cook if the men were to be fed properly and promptly.

The town officials had sent out to the camp a generous provision of wheat, barley, lentils, pulse, sheep, goats, fowls, cheese, oil, salt and wine. I did not learn how the volunteer cooks fared, but the barley-stew, seasoned with minced fowls, which Agathemer concocted, was acclaimed by our century.

That night, in our tent, Agathemer and I, talking Greek and whispering, discussed our situation. After two fulfillments, the prophesy of the Aemilian Sibyl seemed in a fair way to be fulfilled a third time; we were headed for Rome.

To Rome we went. We had, in that first consultation, in many similar consultations later, planned to escape and hoped to escape. But we were too carefully watched. Whether we were suspected because of our scourge-marks and brand-marks, or were prized as cooks, or whether there was some other reason, we could not conjecture. Certainly we were sedulously guarded on all marches, and kept strictly within each camp, though we were free to wander about each camp as we pleased.

We had planned to escape in or near Parma, Mutina, Bononia, or Faventia, any of which towns Agathemer judged a favorable locality for marketing a gem from our amulet-bags. But in these, as everywhere else, our guards gave us no chance of escape.

When not busy cooking I found myself greatly interested in the amazing company among which I was cast. In my rambles about our camp, when all were full-fed and groups sat or lay chatting about the slackening camp-fires, I became acquainted with most of the eighteen centurions from

the legions quartered in Britain, and had talks, sometimes even long talks, with more than half of them. These bluff, burly frontier sergeants, like their corporals and men, treated all their volunteer associates as welcome comrades, even welted and branded runaway slaves acting as cooks. From them I heard again and again the story of discontent, conspiracy, mutiny, insurrection and attempt at protest about rectification of the evils they believed to exist, which tale we had all heard outlined by the sergeant-orator in the Forum of Placentia.

Among the eighteen centurions there was no sergeant-major nor any centurion of the upper rank. The highest in army rank was Sextius Baculus of Isca, a native of Britain and lineally descended, through an original colonist of Isca, from the celebrated sergeant-major of the Divine Julius. He had been twelfth in rank in the Sixth Legion, being second centurion of its second cohort. Not one of his seventeen associates had ranked so high: the next highest being Publius Cordatus, of Lindum, who had been second sergeant of the fourth cohort in the Twentieth Legion.

The totality of my mental impressions of what I heard from these two and other members of this incredible deputation of insurgent mutineers and of what I saw of the doings of the whole deputation, was vague and confused. From the confusion emerged a predominating sense of their many inconsistencies and of the haphazard irresponsibility and inconsequence of their states of mind and actions. They were, indeed, entirely consistent in one respect. Unlike Maternus and his men, not one of them blamed Commodus for anything, not even for having appointed Perennis to his high office and then having permitted him to arrogate to himself all the functions of the government of the Republic and Empire. One and all they excused the Emperor and expressed for him enthusiastic loyalty: one and all they blamed not only the Prefect's mismanagement but also his own appointment on Perennis. Consistent as they were in holding these opinions or in having such feelings, the notions were inconsistent in themselves.

So likewise was their often expressed and manifestly sincere intention to forestall the consummation of the alleged conspiracy and save the Emperor inconsistent with their slow progress from Britain towards Rome. Never having been in Britain and knowing little of it from such reports as I had heard, I could not controvert their assertion that the state of the roads and weather there had made impossible greater speed than they had achieved from their quarters to their port, yet I suspected that men really systematically in earnest might have accomplished in twenty days marches which had occupied them for fifty-one days. I was certain that it was nothing short of ridiculous for legionaries in hard fighting condition and well fed to consume one hundred and one days in marching from their landing-port on the coast of Gaul to Placentia: ten miles a day was despicable marching even for lazy and soft-muscled recruits; any legionaries should make fifteen miles a day under any conditions, earnest men keyed up to hurry should have made twenty and might often march twenty-five miles between camps. These blatherskites were on fire with high resolve, by their talk, yet had loafed along for a thousand miles, camping early, sleeping long after sunrise, resting at midday and gorging themselves at leisurely meals. All this was amazing.

Equally astonishing was the condition of supineness, of all governmental officials in Gaul, local and Imperial, as their tale revealed it. Neither the Prefect of the Rhine, nor any one of the Procurators of Gaul, had, as far as their story indicated, made any effort to arrest them, turn them back, stop them, check them, hinder them or even have them expostulated with. As far as I could infer from all I heard neither had the governing body of any city or town. For all they were interfered with by any official they might have been full-time veterans, honorably discharged, marching homeward under accredited officers provided with diplomas properly made out, signed, sealed and stamped. Everywhere they had been fed at public expense, lodged free or provided with camping-grounds and tents; their pack-animals had been replaced if worn out, and everything they needed had

been provided on their asking for it or even before they made any request. I could only infer that they had inspired fear by their numbers and truculence and that each town or district had striven to keep them in a good humor and to get rid of them as soon as possible by entertaining them lavishly and speeding them along their chosen way.

As they told of their own behavior there had been no consistency or system or method in their additions to their company. By their own account they had enticed men to join them or had ignored likely recruits in the most haphazard fashion, purely as the humor struck them. The like was true of their emptyings of *ergastula* in Italy. At Turin, as well as I could gather from my chats with this or that centurion or soldier or liberated slave, they had set free the inmates of the *ergastulum* by the Segusio Gate and had then turned aside to that by the Vercellæ Gate, but had ignored the larger *ergastulum* by the Milan Gate; though they had marched out of Turin, necessarily, by that gate. Similarly at Milan, they had emptied two *ergastula* and ignored the rest; as at Placentia, where they had expended all their time and energy on the first *ergastulum* they happened on inside the Milan Gate and on ours, and then had ignored or forgotten the four or five others, equally large and equally well filled.

On our progress to Rome I saw similar inconsistencies in their behavior. They never so much as entered Fidentia, but marched round it, acquiescent to the gentle suggestion of a trembling and incoherent alderman, quaking with fear and barely able to enunciate some disjointed sentences. At Parma they emptied two *ergastula* and never so much as approached the others, repeating this inconsistency at Mutina and Bononia. Outside of Faventia something, I never learned what, enraged a knot of the veterans, so that their fury communicated itself to all the soldiery from Britain and inflamed their associates, Gallic and Italian. Whereupon we burst the Bononia Gate of Faventia, flocked into the town, sacked some of the shops, left a score of corpses in the market-place and some in the streets near it, set fire to a

block of buildings, and burst out of the Ariminum Gate tumultuous and excited, but without so much as trying the outer doors of any *ergastulum*.

Yet, after this riotous performance, we did no damage at Ariminum, not even entering the town, not even enquiring if it had an *ergastulum*, as it must have had.

Similarly at Pisaurum, at Fanum Fortunæ, at Forum Sempronii, though these were small towns and could not have resisted us, we camped outside, accepted gracefully the tents and food provided for us and made no move to maltreat anyone or do any looting. But at Nuceria, at Spolitum and at Narnia we entered the towns and liberated the inmates of two of the *ergastula* in each, though we never so much as threatened Interamnia.

Looking back over these proceedings I explain them to myself approximately as follows: the eighteen centurions from Britain treated each other as if they all felt on terms of complete mutual equality, none ever assumed any rights of superiority, seniority, precedence, or authority, none was ever invested with any right of permanent or temporary leadership. If some whim prompted any one of the eighteen to take the lead in emptying an *ergastulum* or breaking in a town gate, or sacking a shop, not one of his fellow-sergeants demurred or expostulated or opposed him; they all concurred in any suggestion of any one of them. And the soldiers followed their centurions with, apparently, implicit confidence in them, or a blind instinct of deference. So of submission to the request of any town decurion, that they stay outside: mostly, they were acquiescent. But if something irritated a sergeant, or even a soldier, the entire deputation flamed into fury and burst gates, sacked shops and even fired buildings until their rage spent inself, after which they were civil and kindly to all townsmen, whether officials, citizens, slaves or women and children. I never could detect any reason for any action or inaction of theirs.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE EMPEROR

THE liberations of public slaves from *ergastula* in Turin, Milan, Placentia, Parma, Mutina, Bononia, Nuceria, Spolitum and Narnia resulted in the formation of eighteen tumultuary centuries, which, between Narnia and Ocriculum, during a long noon-halt, were formed into the semblance of three cohorts, thus we approached Rome as nine cohorts: three of the deputies from Britain; three more of the recruits from Gaul, presumably like the British legionaries, loyal patriots, bent on foiling Perennis, and saving their beloved Emperor; and three more composed of the contents of a dozen or more *ergastula,* opened as the whim took the veteran sergeants, and assumed to contain not pilferers, runaways or evil-doers, but innocent victims of the malignity of the understrappers of that unspeakable Perennis.

As we drew near Rome Agathemer and I discussed our situation and prospects with increasing alarm. After we left Narnia the watch on us was not so close and we might have escaped. But we had seen a score of attempts at escape, by various rascals, foiled and ending in the butchery of the would-be fugitives. While escape was possible the risk was very great. Also, Agathemer argued, we were too near to Rome to be safe if we got clear away. Between dread of death if caught and fear of we knew not what if we escaped, we stuck to our cookery. Mixed with our projects for bettering our prospects we talked much of our amazement at the treatment which the deputation and its associates had met in Italy. Manifestly the townsfolk and their officials were not only overawed, but helpless. If there had been no Rome, no Republic, no Prætorians, no Prefect of the Palace, no central authority whatever we could not have been more completely free from hindrance, coercion or question. Yet Agathemer and I could not but conjecture that the Senate, Perennis and Commodus had been promptly and

minutely informed of all our doings, of our progress, of ou approach; and had taken measures to deal with us and ou instigators. We felt panicky.

Spouting long tirades about their loyalty to the Emperor their hatred of Perennis and their eagerness to foil one an save the other, our irresponsible frontier centurions let thei men and us loiter southward through Cisalpine Gaul an Umbria as they had loitered on the other side of the Alp seldom marching more than ten miles a day. So that w left Ocriculum on the tenth day before the Kalends of Augus and stopped overnight at each change-station.

We had had fair weather all the way from Placentia, ex cept a heavy rain at Ariminum and showers in the moun tains between Forum Sempronii and Nuceria. When da dawned on us at Rostrata Villa, on the eighth day befor the Kalends of August, it dawned cloudy, but not threatening After the usual camp breakfast of porridge and wine, w fell in, by now fairly decent marchers, and set off fo Rubræ. But before we had marched a mile, the low cloud soaked us with such a downpour as I had seldom seen of July morning near Rome. So heavy and so unrelenting wa the rain that we were glad to halt at the change-house a the twentieth mile-stone, where the road from Capena t Veii crosses the Flaminian Highway and where there is prosperous village as large as many a small town. There w found quarters and food ready for us and were well ente tained. Ad Vicesimum, as the place is called, is only fou miles nearer Rome than Villa Rostrata.

It was about midway of that four-mile march in the pou ing rain that I saw by the roadside three immobile horse men, their forms swathed in horsemen's rain-cloaks, thei faces hidden under broad-brimmed rain-hats, lined up wit their horses' noses barely a horse-length from the roadway watching from a little knoll our column as it passed. Th middle horseman of the three looked familiar. I glance back at him and met his eyes, intensely watching me fro under his dripping hat brim, as I trudged on the edge the trudging rabble. A hot qualm surged through me. I

was, it certainly was, the very same man I had seen in the very same guise on the road below Villa Andivia as Tanno and I passed by on our way to our fatal brawl at Vediamnum; the very man who had peered in at me and Capito during his fatal conference with me in Nemestronia's water-garden, the man whom Tanno had asserted that he knew for an Imperial spy. I felt recognition in his gaze; felt that he knew me for my very self. And his nose was hooked.

At our halting place, when Agathemer and I were alone, I asked him in Greek if he had noticed the three stationary horsemen. He at once, without my mentioning my suspicions, declared that he also had recognized the middle horseman precisely as I had. What his presence there might forbode, what his apparent recognition of me might portend, we could not conjecture. We agreed that, although both of us had been on the lookout for Imperial emissaries all the way from Placentia, and alertly watching from Ariminum southwards, this was the first time we had set eyes on any man whom we could take for a secret-service man. That so much time had elapsed since the authorities must have been warned of our approach, that we should have advanced so near Rome and yet that this should be the first visible indication of espionage upon us, amazed both me and Agathemer.

Next day, a cloudy but rainless day, we marched only to Rubræ, the change-station nearest Rome. There, as at every previous halt, we found the authorities apprised of our approach and prepared to lodge and feed us. And, as always since we left Nuceria, we were comfortably sheltered in a camp all ready for our occupancy and lavishly provided with varied food and passable wine.

Next day, the sixth day before the Kalends of August, dawned exquisitely fair and bright, with a soft steady breeze; a perfect July day, mild but not too warm. Our elected sergeants, now quite habituated to their duties and authority as centurions, routed us up early and, after a leisurely camp-breakfast, we fell in and set off on the last stage of this amazing unopposed march of fifteen hundred insurgent mutineers

for nineteen hundred miles, in making which they had so loitered that they had consumed on the road more than half a year and along which they had added to their company casual associates twice as numerous as themselves. We left Rubræ an excited horde, for the veterans were keyed up to a tense pitch of expectancy by their anticipation of they knew not what culmination to their insane adventure and their accidental recruits were aquiver with uneasiness and apprehension.

The Mulvian Bridge over the Tiber is not more than four miles from Rubræ along the winding Flaminian Highway and we were crossing it before the third hour of the day was past. Marching with the first of the three centuries formed at Placentia I had about five-sixths of our column ahead of me. So I did not see, did not even glimpse, did not, from far towards the rear, so much as guess what was happening. I knew only that, as I was more than half way across the Mulvian Bridge, a wave of cheers started far forward in our column and ran back to my century and all the way to the rearmost men. What had occurred we did not know, but we broke ranks and flowed out of the road to left and right, as did the men ahead of us, becoming almost a mob, despite the remonstrances and orders of our disgusted sergeants. They restrained us to some extent, but we were kept back more by the fact that the foremost men blocked the highway, the men who had been marching next them blocked the fields to right and left of the highway and the rest of us were checked behind them, like water above a dam.

As we stood there, packed together, with hardly a semblance of ranks kept anywhere, craning to see over the heads of the men in front of us and to try to see past and between the many big and tall tombs and mausoleums which flanked the road on either side, a period of tense silence or blurred murmurings was ended by a second great surge of cheers from front to rear. We all cheered till we were hoarse. Again we peered and listened and questioned each other, again came a roar of cheering like a sea billow. Again and again alternated the half silence and the uproar. Before

we learned what was happening or had happened word came from mouth to mouth that we were going on. The press in front of us gradually melted away, we were able to sidle into the roadway, reform ranks and tramp on Romewards.

After a very brief march we turned aside to our right into a meadow on the west of the road and its flanking rows of tombs, between the Highway and the Tiber, about half way from Mulvian Bridge to the Flaminian Gate of Rome; that is, about half a mile from each. There we found a meticulously laid-out and perfectly appointed camp, precisely suited to the forty-five hundred of us and our requisitioned mules, wagons and what not. It contained some four hundred and fifty tents, set on clipped grass along rolled and gravelled streets as straight as bricklayers' guide-boards; all about a paved square of ample size, on the rear of which was set up a gorgeous commander's tent of the whitest canvas, striped with red almost as deep, rich and glowing as the Imperial crimson, and manifestly meant to imitate it as closely as such a dyestuff could. On either side of this Prætorium were a dozen tents, smaller indeed than the Prætorium, but much larger than tents set up for us, presumably for the commanders' aides. In front of the Prætorium, between it and the square, was a wide, broad and high platform of new brickwork, paved on top, railed with solid, low, carved railings set in short carved oak posts. The corner posts, and two others dividing the front and back of the platform equally, were tall and supported an awning of striped canvas like that of the commander's tent.

Goggling with curiosity we, as we deployed to our quarters, stared hard at the magnificent tent and sumptuous platform with its gorgeous awning. Once at our quarters, I and Agathemer, of course, must cook and serve food to our century. Only after all were fed did we, in common with all the middle and rear of our road-column, learn what had occurred.

While we ate, our sergeants, while they also ate somehow, held a centurions' council, at which those of the fifty-four who had not been far enough forward on the Highway to see and hear were informed, by those who had, of what had

happened. When our sergeant returned from this council he told us, in a jumbled and mumbled attempt at an address.

From what he told me and from what I heard later I gather that, as the column debouched from the bridge, its head was met and checked by a body of mounted Prætorian Guards. Their tribune, in the name of the Emperor, ordered the column to halt and bade its centurions deploy their men right and left and mass them in a largish space free of big tombs. As they deployed the Prætorians also deployed to left and right of the Highway and the foremost mutineers descried on the roadway the splendid horses and gorgeous trappings of the Emperor's personal staff, among whom, from the statues, busts and painted panel-portraits of him which they had seen daily in their own quarters and countless times on their road to Rome, the more alert of them recognized their liege.

Then rose that unexpected wave of cheering which had first apprized us in the rear that something unusual was toward. Commodus, as I heard from Publius Cordatus himself, after our nap and before the Emperor's return, was mounted on a tall sorrel such as his father had always preferred on his frontier campaigns. Also he was garbed not only as his father had habitually been when on frontier expeditions but seemingly, in one of his old outfits. For not only Cordatus, but a dozen more, declared that his helmet, corselet and the plates of his kilt-straps, were of ungilded, unchased plain steel, not even bright with polishing, but tarnished, all but rusty, with exposure to rain, mist and sun; his plume and cloak rain-faded and sun-faded till their crimson showed almost brown; his scabbard plain, dingy leather; his saddle of similar cheap, durable leather, his saddle-cloth of a crimson faded as brown as his cloak and plume. This was precisely the Spartan simplicity which Aurelius, as more than half Stoic, had always affected, partly from an innate tendency towards self-restraint and modesty, partly that his example might, at first, offset the sumptuosity of Verus and, after his death, might inculcate, by example, economy in his lavish and self-indulgent retinue.

Whatever the motive, by this semi-histrionic effort at self-facement the Emperor made himself tenfold conspicuous nong his staff-officers, whose plumes, cloaks, kilts, and saddle-oths blazed with crimson, green and gold, blue and silver nd even crimson and gold.

Commodus, in any gear, was not only a tall, well-knit, npressive figure of a man, but, in his most negligent moods, e had something about him dominating, masterful, princely nd Imperial. The sight of him cowed all who could then e him. Steadily he eyed them as they finished their tumul-uary deployment and pressed forward to see and hear. Then they were packed as closely as possible till no more ould get within earshot he spoke:

"Fellow soldiers, what does this mean?"

All were too awed at the sight of their venerated Cæsar r any man to speak up at once and the Emperor repeated: "Fellow-soldiers, what does this mean? Tell me, I am our fellow-soldier."

Then Sextius Baculus himself replied, choking and hesi-ting, quailing before his lord:

"We are your loyal soldiers from Britain; a deputation me afoot and afloat almost two thousand miles to warn u of what no man in Rome, for fear of you more than of ur treacherous Prefect, dares to warn you. Perennis is fit guardian of your safety; in fact he is of all men most nfit. For more than two years now he has been laying his ans to have you assassinated, and to make Emperor in your ace his eldest son, the darling of the Illyrian legionaries. e have come to save you, foil him and see him and his ad."

"Fellow-soldiers," the Emperor spoke at once, loudly and early, "I acclaim your purpose and welcome your good tentions. But I mean to prove to you that I am in fact well as in title Tribune and Prince of the Republic, Em-ror of its armies, Augustus and Cæsar. Your solicitude I plaud, but I feel better able to take care of myself than n any other man save myself. I fear no man and appoint man I distrust. I distrust few men after appointment.

You lodge a grave charge against a man I have trusted, appointed and then trusted. I condemn few men unheard. As your Imperator I command you to camp where my legates indicate, to eat a hearty noon meal, to sleep, or at least rest in your tents, two full hours. About the tenth hour of the day I shall return, my trusty guards about me and Perennis himself in my retinue. From the platform of your camp, as a chief commander should, I will harangue you, and from that platform, after he has heard from me your accusation, my Prefect of the Prætorium shall make to you his defense. After he has spoken you shall hear me deliver just and impartial judgment, a judgment no man of you can but accept as fair and righteous.

"And now farewell, until the tenth hour."

At which word he had reined up, wheeled and spurred his mettlesome mount and thereupon vanished with his staff in a cloud of dust, at full gallop.

According to the Emperor's behest we rested in our tents after the centurions had each harangued his men. But if any slept, it was a marvel. All were too excited to sleep and every tent, as far as I could learn, talked without cessation. By the tenth hour, when the sun was visibly declining and the warmth of the midday abating, we were all assembled in the camp-square, the men helmeted and with their swords at their sides, but without shields or spears.

It was perfectly in keeping with the inconsistency of the mutineers that the crowd of men in the camp-square, instead of being marshalled by centuries under their sergeants, was allowed to assemble mob-fashion as each man came and pushed. Thus Agathemer and I, who should have been preparing to cook our company's evening meal, were not only in the throng, but well forward among the men and, in fact pressed legs and chests against the legs and backs of two veterans not far from the rearmost centurions of the gathering of sergeants, not sixty feet from the platform, and nearly opposite its middle, though a little to the left. Few veteran privates heard and saw better than we.

When the Imperial cortege arrived and the platform began

o fill, we two, like the men around us and like, I feel sure, he entire gathering, were amazed to see among the men four omen, and Agathemer and I were doubly amazed to recog- ize one as Marcia. Agathemer, who knew the former slaves nd present freedwomen of the Palace far better than I, hispered that the others were the sister and wife of Peren- is and the wife of Cleander, like him a former slave and ampered freedman, and for long his rival.

The platform, of course, was lined and partly filled with ides, lictors, equerries, pages, and other Imperial satellites efore the Emperor rode up, dismounted and appeared among is retinue. He strode springily to the front and seated him- elf on the crimson cushion of the ivory curule seat which a ictor placed for him. Marcia, to my tenfold amazement, hen seated herself on a not dissimilar maple folding-seat, pread for her by a page. She was placed at the very front f the platform, next him on his right. Next her was Clean- er's wife, also, to my still greater amazement, similarly eated, as were the two almost as ornately clad ladies with Perennis, who sat on his left, he standing to the left of the Emperor, who was set only a short yard in advance of the ow of officials and intimates who lined the front of the latform.

Until all who had a right to places on the platform had nounted it and each had stationed himself in his proper osition, the Emperor sat quietly regarding the mob of men acing him, eyeing us keenly and steadily. An equerry eaned over and whispered to him and he stood up. I could eel the men thrill, even more positively than they had hrilled when he appeared from among his retinue. I con- ectured, instantly, that he had felt, if not an actual dread f the mutineers, at least a doubt as to his ability to quell hem and a need for all possible adventitious aids. Thus I xplained to myself his having donned, that morning, trap- ings such as his father had worn on frontier campaigns, pparently with the purpose of eliciting the sympathies of he men.

He now wore a gilded helmet, elaborately chased, and its

crest a carved Chimæra spouting golden flames, which golden spout of flames, with the Chimæra's wings, formed the support from which waved his crimson plume, all of brilliantly dyed ostrich feathers. His corselet was similarly gilded or, perhaps, like the helmet, even of pure gold hammered and chased, adorned with depictions of the battles of the gods and giants above, and below with Trajan's victories over the Parthians. His kilt-straps were of crimson leather, plated with gilt or gold overlapping scales. His cloak was of the newest and most brilliant Imperial crimson. The platform was so high that I could clearly see his shapely calves and the gold eagles embroidered on the sky-blue soft leather of his half-boots. In his hand he held a short baton or truncheon, such as all field-commanders carry as an emblem of independent command, such as I had seen at Tegulata in the hand of Pescennius Niger. It was gilded or gold-plated and its ends were chased pine-cones. Manifestly every detail of his habiting had been meticulously considered and the total effect carefully calculated. Certainly he was not only handsome and winsome, but dignified and imposing, truly a princely and Imperial figure. Evidently he had calculatingly arrayed himself so as to appear at one and the same time as Emperor and as a field-commander. The effect on the men, if I could judge, was all he had wished, all he could have hoped for. He dominated the mob of men as he dominated the platform.

There was no need of his wave of the arm enjoining silence. The silence, from his first movement as he rose, was as complete as possible.

"Fellow-soldiers," he said, and he spoke as well as the most practiced orator, audibly to all, smoothly and charmingly, "you have come from Britain across the sea, across Gaul, across the Alps, and half the length of Italy, with the best intentions, with the sincerest hearts, to apprize me of danger to me in my own Palace, danger unsuspected by me, as you believe. Your loyalty, your good intentions, your sincerity I realize and rejoice over. But I find it hard to believe that any soldiers in distant frontier garrisons can be better

formed than the Prince himself of what goes on in Italy, Rome, in the very Palace. You have lodged the gravest ccusations against one of my most important and most usted officials. I shall now state your charges, that the ccused man may hear them now for the first time from y own lips and may here and now make his defence to you nd to me."

He paused. My eyes had been on Commodus and now ifted to Perennis. Perennis was a handsome man, but in ite of, rather than because of, his build and features. Even rough the splendid trappings of Prefect of the Prætorium e appeared too tall and too thin, his neck was too long, his ce too long, his ears too big, his long nose overhung his per lip. He was impressive and capable looking but ap- ared too crafty, too foxy. I felt sure that he had not the ast suspicion of what was coming. He looked all vanity, lf-satisfaction and vainglorious self-sufficiency.

"Fellow-soldiers," the Emperor went on, "you charge that y Prefect of the Prætorium is not loyal, but is most treach- rous; that he has been, for more than two years, plotting y death and the elevation to the Principiate of his eldest n, now Procurator of Illyricum. As he has now heard the harge, so you shall now hear the defense of my Prefect f the Prætorium."

I must say that Perennis, though manifestly thunderstruck, ept his senses, kept his self-command and, after a brief stant in which he paled, swayed and seemed utterly dazed, se to the occasion. For that brief instant he appeared as vercome as his horrified wife and sister, who all but fainted n their seats; as his horrified sons, who stood, agape, dead- ale, one by his white-faced mother, and the other by his credulous aunt.

Perennis, certainly, gathered himself together promptly, ot himself under full control, had all his wits about him nd made a perfectly conceived, finely delivered, coherent, gical, telling speech in his own defence. It was long, but owhere diffuse, and it held the attention manifestly, not nly of the mutineers, but of the Emperor himself, and of

all his retinue, even the most vacuous of the mere courtier
As he ended it, it was plain that Perennis believed he ha
cleared himself completely and had not only vindicate
himself before his master, but had convinced the mutinee
of his guiltlessness and loyalty. His expression of face, as h
wound up his eloquent peroration, was that of a man who, u
expectedly to himself, transmounts insuperable difficulti
and triumphs.

Confidently he turned to Commodus; smiling and at eas
he awaited his decision. The Emperor stood up, more dor
inating, if possible, than before.

"Fellow-soldiers," he said, "watch me closely and liste
carefully. What I do shall be as significant as what I sa
I have pondered your charges since you made them this mor
ing. In my mind I have run over all that I knew of th
man's doings and sayings since I made him the guardian
my personal safety. I have let him hear your charges fro
my own lips and, like you, I have listened patiently to h
brilliant and able speech in his own defence. I am Prin
of the Republic and Emperor of its armies, to favor no ma
to do and speak impartial justice to all men alike.

"You know what happens to the shirker who sleeps on h
post when on sentry-duty about a camp at night in the fa
of the enemy. If guilty of what you charge any Prefect
the Prætorium deserves not otherwise than such a traito
I have heard all this man has to say. I did not believe y
this morning. I do not disbelieve you now. I do not b
lieve this man, I believe he has been treacherous and that
his dexterous defence just now he lied. Watch me! I tu
him over to you."

And, with a really magnificent gesture, he stepped half
pace away from Perennis, stretched out his left arm, t
golden baton in his hand, and, with that fatal truncheo
touched him on the shoulder.

The roar that rose was the roar of wild beasts raveni
for their prey. The men, packed as they were, someh
surged forward. On the shoulders of their fellow-centurio
a sort of billow of the foremost sergeants rose like su

against a rock; like surf breaking against a rock a sort of foam of them overflowed the front of the platform. For the twinkling of an eye I beheld above this rising tide of executioners the imperious dignity of the Emperor, master of the scene, self-confident and certain that all men would approve of his decision, magnificent in his military trappings; the incredulous amazement of Perennis, his pale, watery blue eyes bleared in his lead-colored, bloodless face, as he stood dazed and numb; the horror of his bedizened wife and sister, both fleshy women, dark-skinned and normally red-cheeked, now gray with despair, like the two wretched lads beside them; the cruelly feminine relish, as upon the successful fruition of long and tortuous intrigues, blazoned on the faces of Marcia and of Cleander's wife, a very showy woman with golden hair, violet eyes and a delicately pink and white complexion: a similar expression of relished triumph on the broad, fat, ruddy face of her big husband, who looked just what he had been; a man who had started life as a slave; whose master had thought him likely to be most profitably employed as a street porter, in which capacity he had for years carried packs, crates, bales, chests, rafters and such like immensely heavy loads long distances and had thriven on his exertions; who, whatever brains he had since displayed, however much character and merit had contributed to his dazzling rise in life, had retained and still possessed a hearty appetite, a perfect digestion, mighty muscles, hard and solid, all over his hulking frame, and the vast strength of his early prime; all these chief actors framed against a background of gaudily caparisoned officers and courtiers.

In scarcely more than the twinkling of an eye Perennis was seized by four brawny frontier sergeants and hurled down among the men, among whom he vanished like a lynx under a pack of dogs. I caught no afterglimpse of him nor of his frayed corpse; I descried only a sort of whirlpool of active men about the spot where he had, as it were, sunk into their vortex.

When the flailing arms ceased flailing and the panting executioners stood quiet, the Emperor stretched out his right

hand for silence; the rumbling snarls and growls of the mob abated till silence reigned. Into it he spoke:

"You know the custom of our fathers since Numa. The family of a traitor is abolished with him."

There came a second roar of the ravening, ferocious men a second surge of the foremost up the face of the platform and, instantly, the sons, wife and sister of Perennis were pushed from it, cast down among the mob, and never reappeared. After the mob quieted a second time Commodus again raised his hand for silence. Quicker than before the men were still. He spoke loud and clear:

"You have saved me from a treacherous Prefect of the Prætorium. I have meditated whom to appoint to his vacant post. I have considered well. I now present him to you my faithful henchman, Cleander of Mazaca, who, by his own deserts, has won citizenship in the Republic, equestrian rank and my favor and gratitude."

The mob cheered.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MASSACRE

RETROSPECTIVELY, Cleander is talked of, if at all chiefly as having been brutish, dull, stupid, venal, avaricious and cruel. Cruel and avaricious he certainly became venal and brutish he certainly seemed; but dull or stupid I cannot admit that he ever was. Indubitably, at the time of his appointment to be Prefect of the Prætorium, he possessed some qualities fitting him, as he later was, to be entrusted by his self-indulgent master with the administration of the whole Empire. Certainly he was quick-thinking, prompt, ingenious, incredibly persuasive, resolute and ruthless, which qualities go far towards equipping a ruler. Without these characteristics he could not have conceived or adopted the plan which he successfully executed.

Commodus caught Cleander's eye, nodded to him and sa

down. Confident and smiling, Cleander stepped forward to the platform's railing and addressed us.

"As Prefect of the Prætorium, I am charged with the care of the personal safety of our Prince in his Palace, in the City and wherever he may be. Among measures for his personal safety I rate high the maintenance of discipline and loyalty among his frontier garrisons or their reëstablishment if impaired. By his command you are to return speedily whence you came and tell your fellows of the complete success of your mission. I must be sure that your report will satisfy them, that you set out on your return fully satisfied yourselves. Are you satisfied? I ask your senior sergeant to act as spokesman. After he has spoken I shall give all who desire it the opportunity to speak."

Sextius Baculus at once replied that they were not satisfied while the post of Procurator of Illyricum was held by the eldest son of Perennis, or while he held any office, or, in fact, while he was alive.

Cleander, in a loud, far-carrying voice, apprized the entire assemblage of what Baculus had said, and replied to him:

"From now on I am in charge of all matters pertaining to the personal safety of Cæsar, including the apprehension and execution of all traitors and potential traitors. You may rely implicitly on me without suggestions from anyone to take all measures which may be necessary in all such cases. In this case you may feel assured that I have already initiated measures which will infallibly lead to the traitor's return to Italy, without any unsettlement of the loyalty of the Illyrian garrisons, to his being quietly arrested and as quietly executed. Are you satisfied?"

The answer was a roar of cheers, roar after roar. When the cheering subsided Cleander, three separate times, urged anyone who wished to speak up. No man spoke. Then he said:

"I am commissioned by Cæsar to repeat to you explicitly what he has himself partly expressed to you twice today: his appreciation of your fealty and good intentions, his thanks for your good order on your march from Britain and for

your having saved him from unsuspected peril, and his gratitude. But please take note and remember that Cæsar specially commissions me to say to you that no similar deputation from Britain or from anywhere else will ever be permitted to reach Rome, to enter Italy or even to set out from the posts assigned to its members. Any attempt at such a deputation will be treated, not as well-meant effort to help our Sovereign, but as sacrilegious rebellion against him.

"Also please note that, whereas he has accepted your advice and acted upon it, any further expression of advice from any of you or any future attempt of any legionaries to advise the Emperor will be regarded as an unbearable act of insolence and presumption and dealt with as such. Cæsar commands you to be silent and obey.

"Through me he notifies you that your stay at Rome is to be short, that you are, within a few days, under officers appointed by him, to set out on your return march to your Gallic port, there to reembark for Britain, there to guard the frontier or keep order in the provinces. As a preparation for your return march he bids you rest and feast; and, that all may feast, he has lavishly provided food and wine, which you will find ready at your quarters, and with that provision an ample force of cooks and servitors to prepare and distribute your banquet. Cæsar now goes to dine and bids you disperse to dine. I have spoken for Cæsar. Obey!"

Less heartily, perhaps, but universally, this haughty speech was responded to by loud, tumultuous and long-lasting cheers. More cheers saluted the Emperor when he stood up and followed him till he had vanished with his retinue, at full gallop. The men even continued to cheer until Cleander's wife and Marcia had entered their gilded carriages and been driven off in the wake of the Imperial cortege.

Our evening meal was truly, as Cleander had called it, a feast and a banquet. When we reached our quarters the food was ready and just ready and our repast began at once. It was calculated, in every particular, to induce gluttonous gorging and guzzling. Before our hunger was really satis

fied, before we had more than barely begun to drink the temptingly excellent wine, Agathemer whispered in Greek:

"This banquet is an attempt to make all of us sleep far too soundly. Every man of us will be surfeited with food and fuddled with wine. You and I must be exceptions. Be sure to eat less than you want and to make a mere show of drinking. We must keep awake."

We did, and, in our tent, discussed in whispers our situation.

"North of Nuceria," Agathemer said, "I judged that we should be safer by ourselves than with these fools and rabble, but they kept such close watch on us that the risks of escape were too great. South of Narnia I have judged us better off where we were than if wandering alone. Now whatever the risks of an attempt to escape, whatever the perils we may encounter if we escape, try to escape we must. I have an intuition that this camp is, tonight, the most dangerous spot in all Italy."

We peered out of the tent at intervals; without hindrance or danger, for our tent-mates were utterly asleep. The night was windless and warm. A moon, more than half full, rose about midnight and, as it climbed the sky, shed a pearly light through a veil of mist which deepened and thickened. Near the ground the mist was so thick that it made escape easy, though blundering likely.

We tried to judge our time so as to start a full hour before the first streak of dawn. We traversed unhindered a camp sunk in sleep, where we heard no sound but crapulous snorings. Northward, towards the Mulvian Bridge, we sneaked out into the tomb-lined meadows. Through or above the dense fog we could spy the pinnacles of several vast and ambitious mausoleums glittering in the moon-rays.

We were not a hundred yards from the camp when I dimly perceived ahead of us through the fog something like a wall or stockade about two yards high. A step or two further, at the same moment at which I made out that it was a serried rank of helmetted men, a challenge rang out, sharp and peremptory.

Instantaneously we dropped on our hands and knees and crawled back to camp.

"I told you I had a suspicion that this was a dangerous locality," Agathemer whispered when we had stood up and gotten our breath. "Those were regular infantry of some sort. We can only hope that they are on that side only. Let's try towards Rome."

There, at about the same distance we were similarly challenged.

In camp again Agathemer said:

"Those were Prætorian infantrymen, and they were standing shoulder to shoulder. This looks bad. But I believe in taking every possible chance. Let's try towards the road."

Eastwards also we encountered the like obstacle.

Back we crawled unpursued. As we skurried through the snoring camp, unperceived by the sodden sleepers, Agathemer said, aloud:

"This looks increasingly bad. The Prætorians are standing with interlocked elbows; they look unpleasantly like samples of a complete cordon round the camp. The mounted Prætorians are behind them not two horse-lengths and less than that apart. I divined some sort of troops massed behind the cavalrymen. I feel frightened."

Out we raced towards the broad Tiber, towards it we crept through fog across the meadow. Again we were challenged. The cordon was, apparently, complete.

As we regained the camp Agathemer said:

"If we are to escape alive we need all our craft, and we must be quick."

We sprinted, not to our quarters, but to those of the British veterans. Into each tent we peered.

Every tent was empty!

Agathemer, plainly, felt in a desperate hurry, yet he took time to glance into the most of the hundred and fifty tents, tearing along past the lines of them. He also took time, after our brief inspection was finished, to pause, get his breath and say:

"This looks worse than bad. I miss my guess if many of these slumberers wake alive. Strip!"

We stripped of everything except our amulet bags.

Then, at full run, stark naked, our unsheathed sheath-knives in our hands, we raced through the fog, now glimmering with the first forehint of coming dawn, along the inner edge of the veterans' tents, till we were opposite the quarters of the tumultuary century formed from the outpourings of the *ergastulum* at Nuceria.

Into one of the veterans' tents we went.

"Knife in teeth!" said Agathemer.

The tents were lavishly provided with unsoldierly comforts, a double allowance of blankets and mattresses stuffed with dried reeds or sedge. Motioning me to help, Agathemer doubled a mattress and pressed on it till it lay so. Then he doubled another and set it so that the two were about a yard apart, with their folds towards each other. Another pair he set similarly so that the interval between the folds was over two yards long. Then we roofed the interval, so to speak, with two mattresses laid flat, and laid two more on each of these. Not yet satisfied Agathemer led me out four times to drag in, from the near-by tents, mattresses, two of which we laid lengthwise over the triple mattress-roof, the others we heaped over the end of the roofed tunnel furthest from the opening of the tent.

Then we went outside yet again and cut the ropes of the two adjacent tents and of the one above the pile of mattresses. We threw our knives far away and bunched up the collapsed canvas of that tent so that it formed a sort of continuation of the mattress-roofed tunnel. Then we crawled, feet first, into the tunnel, taking with us two full water-bottles which Agathemer had found in one of the tents and a quarter loaf of bread, left over from the banquet. It smelt appetizing.

We wriggled into the tunnel side by side, until our heads were well under the mattress-roof. We could see out under the huddled, crumpled canvas. Full in our limited view

lay, in the middle of the camp street, a fat Nucerian, the outline of his big chest and prominent paunch dimly visible in the increasing light. His gurgling snores were plainly audible.

Agathemer broke off two fragments of the bread and we munched ruminatively.

We had hardly swallowed three mouthfuls when Agathemer exclaimed:

"Just in time! I can hear the arrows already! Listen!"

We listened. I could hear a sound as of hail on roofs. And, just above us, I could hear the arrows plunge into our protecting mound with a swishing, rending thud.

"We ought to be safe," Agathemer whispered. "But we may get skewered even as we are. Volleyed arrows drive deep."

I heard many a volley and, after the first, since I was listening for it, I heard faintly before each volley the deep boom of thousands of powerful bows, twanging all at the same instant.

As the light increased I could see the drunken Nucerian with his hummocky outline emphasized by five feathered arrows planted in his body. He must have been killed by any of the five.

When we saw living men pass across our outlook, their legs looked like those of some sort of foreign auxiliaries. I made the conjecture, from their movements, that they were killing the merely wounded. Certainly, one of them drove his long sword through the prostrate, arrow-skewered Nucerian; and sometime later, another, with quite a different type of leg-coverings, did the like.

After daylight we saw pass by the legs of many Prætorian infantrymen and of some cavalrymen. From the second hour we saw only legs of some novel sort of regular soldiery whose trappings neither of us could recognize.

It grew hot in our hiding place. We talked in whispers while talking we seemed more indifferent to the heat.

Agathemer said:

"All this must have been planned beforehand and care

fully and very skillfully carried out. It took ingenuity, minutely detailed arrangements and great skill to arrange that banquet so as to get all the tumultuary additions to the deputation surfeited and dead drunk and yet keep the veteran legionaries near enough to being sober to be waked up, marshalled and marched out. And it took amazing eloquence to wheedle their centurions into abandoning their invited associates. The whole thing is a miracle. I can't see through it."

I may interpolate here, what I learned more than four years later, after Cleander's downfall and death and after my return from Africa, that Agathemer's conjectures, as we talked the matter over in our nook, were correct. Perennis had formulated the plan and had prepared for it and given the preliminary orders. His was the policy of allowing the mutineers to march all the way to Rome unhindered. He, without consulting the Emperor and with every care to prevent him from suspecting what was afoot, imported a thousand archers from Crete, and as many mounted bowmen from Numidia, from Mauretania and from Gætulia. He planned the banquet-feast, he made arrangements for the cordon of Prætorians. The massacre was his idea.

Cleander must have known of all this; he could not, like Commodus, be kept in ignorance. Either before he came to our camp, or, perhaps, in his elation at his rival's ruin and his own success, he adopted the ready plan. Most likely the separation from their fellows of the veteran mutineers was all his own idea; Perennis was not the man to carry out so bold a stroke nor so much as to conceive of it. Indubitably, after dark, the eighteen veteran sergeants were secretly called to a meeting with Cleander. The fellow must have possessed superhuman powers of persuasion. Certainly he made a long speech in which he convinced the leaders of the mutineers that their having associated with themselves tumultuary recruits in Gaul and the liberated inmates of *ergastula* in Italy was inconsistent with their expressed loyalty to Cæsar and the Commonwealth; that by such action they had gravely imperilled the very existence

of the Republic and the safety of their Emperor. He won them over so completely that they acceded, without hesitation, to his dictum that they ought to do all in their power to repair the ill effects of their error of judgment; that the only way was to abandon their associates, to leave them for him to deal with and to march with all speed back to Britain to reassure their fellow-insurgents and reclaim Britain to effective loyalty.

So completely were they under his spell that they returned to their camp, roused their men without waking any of their tumultuary associates, and marched the whole body of veterans, in the night, across the Mulvian Bridge and on all day to a prepared camp near Careiæ, where they spent the night. From there they marched in two days the forty-six miles to Cosa; whence they followed the Aurelian road to Marseilles, as we had ridden it, and from there marched across Gaul to Gessoriacum and shipped for Britain, all in half the time in which they had come.

Agathemer and I spent the whole day in our hiding place, suffering terribly from the heat, for the day was hot, muggy and breezeless, so that the still sultry air was stifling. We spared our water-bottles and made their contents last. Our bread we munched relishingly after noon.

Before sunset we were discovered and unearthed by some of the infantry whose trappings were unknown to us. We found out later that they belonged to the newly-enlisted Viarii, cohorts created from picked young men judged agile, alert, intelligent and loyal, to act as a special road-constabulary to deal with robbers and especially with the bands obeying the King of the Highwaymen and with him.

Our captors did not treat us roughly, though they bound our hands behind us effectually. They laughed over our device for escaping the arrows and commented on our cleverness. Our amulet-bags they ignored, being more interested in our brand-marks and scourge-scars. Their sergeant asked us where we were from.

"Do you think it likely," Agathemer laughed, "that we would tell you; can't you read on our backs that, wherever

we came from it is the last place on earth we want to go back to?"

The sergeant laughed genially.

"Mark 'em 'unidentified'," he ordered.

They clothed us in tunics innocent of any blood-stains, but which, we felt sure, had been taken from the corpses of our late associates.

"Put 'em with the rest," the sergeant ordered.

With the rest, some three hundred survivors out of more than three thousand tumultuaries, we were herded inside a convoy of constabulary and marched in the dusk and dark to our former camp at Rubræ. There we were liberally fed on what was, apparently, the leavings from the entertainment afforded the mutineers there on their down-march.

Next morning we were lined up and inspected by a superior officer with two orderlies and two secretaries. As he passed down the rank in which Agathemer and I stood he eyed us keenly. After a time he returned and said:

"These two rascals are trying to keep together. Separate them!"

Thereafter I saw no more of Agathemer for over four years.

I do not wish to dwell on my wretchedness, after we were parted. Alone among riffraff, I was very miserable. I mourned for the faithful fellow and knew he mourned for me. I longed for him as keenly as if he had been my twin-brother.

I and my fellows were marched on under close convoy, up the Flaminian Highway and the batch among which I was, was cast into the *ergastulum* at Nuceria.

There I passed a miserable winter. Our prison was not unlike the *ergastulum* at Placentia; ill-designed, damp, cold, filthy, swarming with vermin and crowded with wretches like myself. I was despondent in my loneliness and found harder to bear my shiverings, my fitful half-sleep in my foul infested bunk, the horrible food, the grinding labor, the stripes and blows and insults of the guards and overseers and the jeers of my inhuman fellow-sufferers. This time I had no

chance of becoming cook's-helper or of easing my circumstances in any other manner. I spent the entire winter haggard for sleep, underclad, underfed, overworked, shivering, beaten and abused.

Conditions in that *ergastulum* were more than amazing. It was so utterly mismanaged that, in fact, very little effective work was done, though the inmates were roused early, set to their tasks before they could really see, lashed all day, given but a very brief rest at noon and released only after dusk. Half the prisoners judiciously directed could have ground twice as much grain. As it was, the superintendent and overseers had far less real authority than a sort of dictator elected or selected or tolerated by the rabble. He had a sort of senate of the six most ruffianly of the prisoners. These seven ruled the *ergastulum* and their power was effective for overworking and underfeeding, even more than the generality, those whom they disliked, and for diminishing the labors and increasing the rations of their favorites. The existence of this secret government among the rabble was in itself astonishing, its methods yet more so.

Unlike the *ergastulum* at Placentia the watch at the *ergastulum* at Nuceria was very lax and haphazard. It was effective at keeping us in; there were but three escapes all winter. But communication with the outside world was fairly easy and was kept up unceasingly. Many of the inmates had friends among the slaves of Nuceria. The gate-guards were so remiss that, daily, one or more outsiders entered our prison and left when they pleased. The henchmen of the dictator even managed to slip out and spend an hour or more where they pleased in the city. This, however, was possible only if they returned soon, for the superintendent was keen on calling us over three times a day.

Through the activities of those inmates who arranged to get out and return, and of their friends who entered and left, since the weighers of the grain and flour were careless and their inspectors negligent, the dictator and his friends drove a regular and profitable trade in stolen flour, which they exchanged for wine, oil, dainties, stolen clothing and such

other articles as they desired; they even sold much of it for cash, and not only the dictator but each of the six senators had a hoard of coins, not merely coppers, but broad silver pieces.

In this traffic and its advantages I had no share. In fact, of all his fellows, I think the dictator hated me most; certainly he bullied me, made my lot harder in countless petty ways, and abused and insulted me constantly.

After mid-winter I became aware of a traffic not only in dainties and wine, but in implements and weapons. Many daggers and knives were smuggled into the *ergastulum,* not a few files. The senators had a small arsenal of old swords, regular infantry swords, rusty but dangerous. Gradually I heard whispers of a plot. The conspirators were to file through the bars of more than one window, plastering up the filed places with filth and earth to conceal the filing, leaving a thread of metal to hold the filed bars in place. Then, when all was ready, they planned to murder the guards, overseers and superintendent, break out, sack the town-arsenal, loot shops and mansions, and then, well-clad and fully armed, take to the mountains and join the bands of the King of the Highwaymen. Two of the senators claimed to have been men of his before their incarceration and promised to lead the rest to the haunts of his brigands.

The date set for their attempt was the fourteenth day before the Kalends of April, a few days before the Vernal Equinox. My gorge rose at the idea of the burning and sacking of Nuceria, even at the slaughter of our cruel guards, overseers and superintendent. The more I thought the matter over the less I liked the prospect. I had every reason to hate the dictator and senators. I saw no likelihood of betterment for myself if I were carried off with these riffraff as one of a band of looters, murderers and outlaws, loose in the forests.

I contrived to disclose the plot to the prison authorities. As a result the *ergastulum* was entered by the town guards, rigorously searched by the aldermen and their apparitors, under the aldermen's eyes, all the sawn bars, files, knives,

daggers and swords discovered, the suspected men tortured till the ring-leaders were identified, the dictator and his senators flogged and manacled, and the management of the *ergastulum* renovated.

I was conducted from the prison, given a bath, clothed in a clean, warm tunic and cloak, provided with good shoes, abundantly fed and put to sleep in a clean bed in the house of a freedman who watched closely that I did not escape, but did everything to make me comfortable.

The next day the chief alderman of Nuceria interrogated me at the town hall, praised me, declared that I had saved the town many horrors and much damage and loss, and asked me what reward I craved.

I answered, boldly, that what I craved was what all slaves craved: freedom.

He replied that, in his opinion, I had merited manumission; but that I was not the property of the municipality of Nuceria, but of the *fiscus;* * I was, in short, part of the personal property of the Emperor and could be manumitted only by the Emperor, or by one of his legal representatives. Such a manumission would be difficult to arrange and its arrangement would take a long time. He would set to work to try to arrange for it. Meantime, could I not ask some reward within their power to grant?

I at once replied that I desired above all things never to be returned to that *ergastulum.*

This he promised immediately, saying that recommitment there would be equivalent to a sentence of torture and death, since my late associates, infuriated at my treachery, as they named it, would certainly inflict on me all the torments their malignity could suggest and keep on till I died. He added that he and the other aldermen had never meant to recommit me; deliverance from that *ergastulum* they considered part of my reward and that the least part of it. What else did I desire?

"If," said I, "I must remain a slave and, remaining the property of Cæsar, must be employed as the administration of the *fiscus* direct, at least try to arrange that I be employed

* See Note B.

out of doors far from any town, on a slave farm, or at herding or wood-cutting or charcoal-burning. I have heard that many of Cæsar's slave-gangs are busy afield, on farms or pasture-lands or in the forests."

"That," said the alderman, "will be easy. Afield you shall go—even far afield. Do you like horses? Can you manage horses?"

"I love all animals," I said, "and most particularly horses."

"Then," said the alderman, "I have already in mind the very place for you, where none of your rancorous late associates can ever find you, on an Imperial stock-farm or breeding-ranch in the uplands, among the forested mountains. Would you consider it a reward, would you consider it the fulfillment of your wish to be transferred from our town *ergastulum*, where you were as an Imperial slave rented out to our city, to such an Imperial estate, where you will be directly under the employees of the *fiscus*?"

"I certainly should feel rewarded," I said, "by such a transfer."

"In addition," he concluded, "we shall present you with a new tunic and cloak and new shoes, also an extra tunic, and with a purse containing ten silver pieces."

CHAPTER XXV

THE OPEN COUNTRY

AFTER some days of rest, abundant food and leisurely hot-baths in the freedman's house, I left Nuceria under convoy of three genial road-constables and journeyed deliberately northward along the Flaminian Highway to the Imperial estate which was to be my abode. I am not going to locate it precisely nor to name the villages nearest it nor the neighboring towns. It will be quite sufficient to set down that it was near the Flaminian Highway and approximately half way between Nuceria and Forum Sempronii.

My reasons for vagueness are mandatory, to my mind. Feuds in the Umbrian mountains differ greatly from feuds in the Sabine hills; but, like Sabinum, Umbria is afflicted with feuds. Now I anticipate that this book will not only be widely read among our nobility and gentry and much discussed by them, but also that it will be talked of by more than half Rome and that copies of it and talk about it will spread all over Italy and even into the provinces. Talk of it may trickle into the Umbrian mountains. Umbrian mountaineers live long. Some of those who loved me and befriended me or loved and befriended those who loved and befriended me, may still be alive and hearty and likely to live many years yet. So also may be some of those who hated me. I do not want anyone holding a grudge, or nursing the grudge of a dead kinsman or friend, to learn through me of any secret kindness to me which he might regard as treachery to his kin and so feel impelled to avenge on those who befriended me or their children or grandchildren. Umbrian enmities ramify incredibly and endure from generation to generation. I remember with gratitude many Umbrians who were kind to me; I would not, however, indirectly cause any trouble to them in their old age, or to their descendants.

The Imperial estate was large and I learned its history. It was made up of three adjacent properties confiscated at different periods by different Emperors. One had fallen to the *fiscus* under Nero, a second under Domitian, and a third under Trajan, each as the result of its owner being implicated in a conspiracy against the Emperor. The administration of the resultant large estate was a perfect sample of the excellent management in detail and stupid misjudgment in general so common under the *fiscus*. The estate was hilly, some of it mountainous, and quite unfitted for horse-breeding, which is best engaged in, as everybody knows, on estates composed chiefly of wide-spreading plains or gently rolling country with broad, flat meadows. Good judgment would have put this estate chiefly in forest, with a few cattle, some sheep and more goats, but no horses. As I found it, it had, to be sure, many goats, but almost as many sheep and cattle, and horses

almost as numerous as the cattle and far more important, for to their breeding most of the efforts of the overseer were directed.

The overseer's house was the best of the three original villas. About it were ample, commodious and scrupulously clean quarters for slaves like me. Also it had yards for fowls, ducks, geese, guinea-fowls, and peacocks, arranged before the confiscation and allowed since to run down, but still productive and fairly well-filled with birds, as were the big dovecotes. Besides, there were fish ponds and a rabbit-warren, left from the former villa. There were extensive stables, cattle-sheds and pens, sheep-folds, goat-runs and pig-sties adjoining the house. In the quarters I found a goodly company of hearty, healthy, contented slaves, sty-wards, goatherds, shepherds, cowmen and horse-wranglers. These were friendly from my first arrival among them, seemed to look me over deliberately and appraise me, and appeared to like me.

I was first sent out as one of two assistants to an experienced herder in charge of a rather large herd of beef-steers. We drove them up the mountains to a grassy glade and, when they had eaten down the grass there, to another. Our duties were light, as the steers were not very wild or fierce and were easy to keep together, to keep in motion by day and to keep stationary by night. Each night two of us slept by a smouldering fire and the third circled about the herd as the steers lay sleeping or chewing their cuds. The circling was done at the horse's slowest walk. Our horses were good, our food good, and my two companions genial, though reticent.

Only once did any of our charges bolt. Then, when we missed three steers, our senior asked me:

"Do you think you could find them and fetch them back?"

On my affirming confidence that I could he smiled doubtfully, and shook his head, but drawled:

"I'll give you the chance, just to try you out."

I found the runaways with no trouble whatever, for their trail was nowhere faint, turned them easily and brought them back, manifestly, much sooner than he had hoped. He appeared pleased, but merely grunted.

Yet he must have spoken well of me to the superintendent, for after a day's rest in the slave-quarters I was assigned the sole care of a small bunch of young cows with their first calves. It seemed to be assumed that I would make no attempt to escape. As I had been given a good horse and a serviceable rain-cloak, I had thoroughly enjoyed my life from the start.

The landscape was charming, the climate agreeable, spring was approaching, I was out in the open air, camping at night by a fire wherever my charges lay down to sleep, eating what I chose of the ample supply of good food which I carried in my saddle-bags. I was happy, thoroughly happy, and I throve from my arrival. I still mourned for Agathemer, but I did not miss him as acutely as I had in the *ergastulum*.

After about ten days in the woodland glades I brought my charges back to the villa for inspection, according to orders. The inspector was pleased with their condition and commended me. Some of the fellow-herdsmen, off duty, stood or sat about and they seemed to approve.

One of them asked:

"Have much trouble, Greenhorn?"

"Not a bit," I answered.

"How'd you like to try to milk one of those cows?" another enquired.

"I can milk any one of them," I replied. "I have milked most of them. I've been drinking all the milk I could hold all the while I was out with them."

"That's the silliest lie I ever heard," they chorused. "Why, if you tried to handle any one of those cows she'd gore you to death. You couldn't get near enough to the udder of any one of them to get your hand on her teats. Invent a lie we can swallow, or quit bragging. You can't fool us."

I kept my temper, scaled the enclosure of the cow-pen, being careful not to make any sudden movement, strolled to the nearest cow, stroked her nose, pulled her ears, walked down her flank, patting her as I went and handled her udder.

"What have you to say now?" I called to the gaping yokels.

"Try that on another," they shouted back.

I did the like with two more.

They were dumb.

"Hand me a crock," I called, "and I'll get a quart or so of milk, if the calves have left any."

When one handed me a small *olla* I milked it more than half-full from a dozen cows. I exhibited the milk, offered it to them, and, on their laughingly replying that they were no milk-sops, they preferred wine, I drank most of it. Then I went to the nearest calf, gentled it, picked it up, lifted it onto my back, its legs sticking out in front of me across my shoulders, and paced back and forth along the inside of the fence, the mother following me, licking the calf and lowing, but mild and with no show of anger, let alone any threat of attack on me.

Before I put the calf down the superintendent came along.

"What's all this?" he queried.

"Felix here," he was answered, "is a sort of wizard. He can gentle these cows, he can milk them, and he has been showing off how one will let him carry her calf and yet not get excited."

"Can you do as well with bulls, too?" the *Villicus* enquired.

"I think so," I replied. I had put down the calf and climbed out of the cow-pen.

"Come along!" the *Villicus* commanded.

We trooped off to a pen where there was a fine breeding-bull all alone.

"Get inside, lad!" said the *Villicus;* "that is, if you dare. But be sure you are ready to vault out again, and entirely able to clear the pen."

I climbed into the pen and stood. The bull gazed at me, but made no threatening movement and his demeanor was placid. I walked up to him, a pace at a time, patted his nose, pulled his ears, walked round him, stroking him, took hold of the ring in his nose and led him over toward the awe-struck gapers:

When I climbed out of the pen one man said:

"Try him on old Scrofa."

We trooped off to the hog-pens and there was a six or

eight-year-old sow with a young litter. She was a huge beast, as ugly a sow as ever I saw. I got into her pen, miring half to my knees in its filth, but keeping my feet. She made no move to attack me, but grunted enquiringly. I picked up one of her pigs, it hardly squealed and she grunted scarcely more than she had already. I dangled the piglet before her, and she only smelt it and kept on grunting, with no sign of wrath.

"Come out, Felix," the *Villicus* drawled, "you are sow-proof. But how do you do it?"

"I don't know," I replied, "but I have always been able to gentle fierce animals of any kind. No animal ever attacks me."

Thereupon he tried me with three rams famous for butting, two he-goats of even worse reputation and half a score of watch-dogs. I came unscathed from close companionship with the goats and rams, and the dogs behaved as if they had been my pets from their puppyhood.

"Can you do as well with horses?" the *Villicus* enquired.

"I believe so," I replied; "give me a chance."

"I shall," he asserted. "I'll round up all our colts fit for breaking and try you on them. I'll get in most of the boys to watch the fun. It'll take about ten days to get ready. Meanwhile you can take out another bunch of heifers with new calves. It seems to suit you and the calves and the heifers."

When I returned from my third outing, hard and fit and happy, the *Villicus* asked me how soon I would be ready for colt-breaking.

"Tomorrow," I said.

The next day was made a sort of festival, with all the horse-herders at the villa paddocks.

First of all four experienced horse-wranglers roped a filly, threw her, bitted and bridled her while one sat on her head, let her get on her feet, hobbled her, held her so while two more saddled her and then held her while one mounted her. When they let her go she reared, bucked, dashed about, bucked again and again, and continued till exhaustion forced her to

quiet down and obey her rider, who had kept his seat from the first.

"What do you think of that, Felix?" the *Villicus* asked me.

"As good horse-wrangling as can be seen anywhere," I replied. "Up to standard and even above normal. But I can do better."

"Bold words," said the *Villicus*; "we'll give you a chance to prove them."

Another filly was roped, bitted, bridled, and saddled, and her captors invited me to mount.

"Pooh!" said I. "Let some one else ride her. I don't need all those preliminaries. I can walk right out into that bunch of colts, catch any young stallion you point out, hold him by the nose, gentle him without any rope or thong on him, mount him by vaulting onto his back, and ride him about unbitted, unbridled, bareback, and as I please, without his rearing or bucking or kicking."

"Son," said the *Villicus,* "you are either a lunatic or a demigod. Go in and try what you boast you can do. Show us."

"Point out your stallion," I suggested.

He indicated a beautiful bay with a white face. He let me approach him at my first attempt, let me take him by the nose, let me lead him close to my dumbfounded audience, let me mount him. I rode him about, turning him to right or left as the *Villicus* ordered, at my suggestion. When I got off I lifted each of his hoofs in succession, crawled under his belly, crawled between his fore-legs, and then between his hind-legs, while the onlookers held their breath; finally I stood behind him, slapped his rump and pulled his tail.

"Is he broken?" I queried.

"Apparently he is gentle as a lamb to you," the *Villicus* admitted, "but how about the rest of us?"

"Bring in a saddle and bridle," I suggested, "and I'll bit him and hold him while two of you saddle him and until one of you mounts him. He should be no more dangerous than a roped filly."

They did as I suggested and I then rode him about until

he appeared used to the saddle and bit and already, at once, bridle-wise. Then one of the wranglers rode him.

I gentled colt after colt all that day till sunset, with a very brief pause for food and rest. Also I kept it up next day until mid-afternoon, when the last colt had been tamed.

Then, as we stood breathing, one of the horse-wranglers suggested:

"Try him on Selinus."

"That would be plain murder," one of the others cried.

"I am not so sure," the *Villicus* ruminated. "I am almost ready to feel that he might even tame Selinus."

Off we trooped to the stable of the choice breeding-stallions. There, in a darkened box-stall, I was shown a beautiful demon of a horse, four years old, a sorrel, with a white face and white forefeet. He certainly looked wicked enough.

"Will you try him?" the *Villicus* asked me.

"Of course," I said. "Let him out into the yard or the paddock."

Into the paddock he was let out, by means of a door in his stall worked by winches from above. In the afternoon sunlight he pranced and curvetted about, a joy to see.

"Let me show Felix what he is like," one of the younger horse-wranglers suggested.

"You can," the *Villicus* agreed. "We all know how agile you are and how quick at vaulting a fence."

The fellow vaulted into the paddock when Selinus was at its further corner. The moment the beast saw him he charged at full-run, screaming like an angry gander, the picture of a man-killer, ears laid back, nostrils wide and red, mouth open, teeth bared, forehoofs lashing out high in front, an equine fury. The lad vaulted the fence handily when Selinus was not three yards from him and the brute pawed angrily at the palings and bit them viciously.

"Want to try, Felix?" the *Villicus* asked me again.

Without a word I vaulted the enclosure within two yards of Selinus. He stood, ears cocked forward, nostrils quiet, mouth shut, all four hoofs on the ground, quivering all over.

Inch by inch I neared him till my hand touched him. He trembled like an aspen-leaf, but did not attack me.

"Hercules be good to us all!" exclaimed one of the men.

After that I did with Selinus all I had done with the first stallion-colt, gentling him, leading him by the nose, mounting him, riding him, crawling under his belly, between his fore-legs and hind-legs, pulling his tail, slapping him liberally all over. Then, timidly, urged by their comrades' jeers, the two wranglers whom I invited brought me a saddle and bridle and I bitted him and held him while they saddled. Then I rode him.

Afterwards, with much misgiving, but shamed into boldness, the chief horse-wrangler mounted him and rode him.

Selinus was tamed!

"Felix," said the *Villicus*, "you are too valuable to set to herding cattle. You are henceforward chief horse-wrangler of this estate. I'll give you a house all to yourself and a girl to keep house for you. When not horse taming here or wherever I lend you out, you can spend your time as you please."

The onlookers acclaimed his award and the displaced chief-horse-wrangler shook hands with me and declared that he was proud to be second to such a wonder as "Felix the Wizard."

After that I lived a life of ease. My dwelling was a neat cottage well shaded with fine trees and bowered in climbing vines, with a tiny courtyard, a not too tiny atrium with a hearth, a kitchen, a store-room and two bed-rooms. It was as clean as possible and well furnished for a slave's quarters. The girl and I liked each other at first sight. I am not going to tell her name, but a jest we had between us led me to call her by the pet name of Septima. If she had been a free-woman, she would have been described as a young widow. Her former mate, one of the horse-wranglers, had been killed by Selinus the previous autumn. Their child, not a year old, had died before his father. Septima had recovered from her grief during the winter and had become normally cheerful

before she was assigned to me. I found her constitutionally merry, very good company, always diligent, a surpassing cook, magical with the garden, especially with her beloved flowers, a capable needle-woman, always neat, and very good-looking. We got on famously together.

With her beehives only, Septima had trouble. She understood bees perfectly, but was afraid of them, and with reason, for she was manifestly obnoxious to bees and was far too often stung. Of course, bees, like all other living creatures, were mild to me. I tended her hives, under her supervision, for I knew nothing of bees; according to her directions I captured several swarms for her. Also I, when the time came, removed combs from such hives as she designated.

Spring was in its full glory and I felt the exhilaration of it. Each home-coming was a delight. And I was much away, for the *Villicus* had me convoyed about the countryside to every estate which possessed an unbroken colt or an intractable horse. I gentled successfully every one I encountered.

After all the bad horses and raw colts for miles around had been tamed I spent some days idling about my cottage and getting acquainted with it and with Septima. But within not many days I grew restive. I told the *Villicus* I wanted something to do.

"Well," he said, "five steers have eluded one of my herd-gangs and no one can find them. Question the men (he named them) so as to get the right start, and try your luck."

I was off, trailing those five steers, for three days and two nights. By sunset of the third day I had them back at the villa.

After that I was called on to hunt down and round up all stampeded cattle and all strays, whether cattle, horses, goats, sheep or swine. I enjoyed my lone outings and between them basked contentedly in the comfort of my cottage and the amenity of Septima's cheeriness. During my stays at home I thoroughly familiarized myself with the villa, its outbuildings and all their inhabitants. Also I put a good deal of time on Selinus, whom I transformed from an insane man-killer into

one of the gentlest stallions I ever heard of. I taught him all the niceties of obedience acclaimed in perfect parade horses till he would stand, sidle, back, sidle diagonally, curvet and execute all the show-steps promptly at the signalling touch or sound. I tamed him till he would let anybody gentle him, till it was perfectly safe for anyone to ride him. I even trusted Septima on him and he justified my confidence in my training of him and in him. In fact, from being a man-killer who had to be kept penned up in the dark, whom, not even the boldest horse-master dare approach, he became so gentle and so trustworthy that he could be let run at large, mild to all human beings, even to strangers.

He grew to love me like a pet dog, followed me about when I was not riding him, and would come to me from far away to a call or gesticulation; and he could see me and recognize me at such distances that I revised my notions as to the powers of sight possessed by horses, for I had held the common opinion that no horse can see clearly or definitely any object at all far from him. Selinus repeatedly saw and recognized me a full half-mile away and galloped to me, approaching with every demonstration of joy.

During my horse-wrangling expeditions and my excursions after wandering stock I had grown well acquainted with the country-side and its inhabitants. I was on terms of comradeship with all my fellow-slaves, of easy sociability with the yeomanry; while I was treated by the overseers, the *Villicus*, and inspectors with marked consideration. Thus I rapidly learnt all there was to know of the idiosyncrasies of the locality, since everybody seemed to trust me and no one held aloof or was reticent with me.

I found conditions in the Umbrian mountains as amazing, as incredible as in the *ergastulum* at Nuceria. There the two vital facts were the negligence and impotence of the warders and the secret system for cheating and thwarting them. Here all the thoughts of slaves, peasants and yeomen on the one hand, and of overseers, inspectors and landowners on the other, pivoted on the existence in the district of a post of road-constabulary on the lookout for bandits and of a camp

of brigands owing allegiance to the King of the Highwaymen.

The wealthy proprietors, the gentlemanly landowners, the inspectors of the Estate, its *Villicus* and his overseers all suspected the presence of the bandits and were doing all they could to assist the road-constabulary to locate them, pounce on them and capture them. Their efforts were completely futile. Neither any of the constabulary nor any of the well-to-do persons who sided with them, could ever get an inkling of the location of the outlaws' various camps nor was any of them ever able to be really sure that bandits were actually within a few miles. For the whole body of yeomanry, peasants and slaves, even the slaves of those proprietors keenest on the scent of the brigands and most eager to nab them, were leagued to bamboozle, thwart and oppose their masters and betters, and to aid the outlaws, to keep them posted on everything said and proposed by the loyal inhabitants, and to assist them in outwitting the authorities, the constabulary and all persons who sided with them. In this they were notably successful.

It is my keen recollection of this condition of things which determines me to omit from this part of my narrative all names of persons and places. The generality of the population made a sort of religion out of their complicity with the outlaws. They took an almost religious pride in coöperating with them and in antagonizing their adversaries. They hated all the adversaries of the outlaws, whether landowners, constabulary or inspectors. But, above all, they loathed, abhorred, abominated and detested with a white-hot animosity any yeoman, peasant or slave who failed to do all in his power to foster the interests of the outlaws; regarding such persons, male or female, as traitors to the cause of the populace. Especially did they cherish an envenomed and malignant grudge against anyone who actually sided with the constabulary, gave them information or betrayed the outlaws; or even against anyone who helped or shielded any such informer.

As I was the means of spoiling the long-prepared and much-hoped for coup on which the robbers had set their highest hopes, as not a few men and women assisted me with

nformation, aided me in other ways and protected me after-
wards, I dare not name any names for fear that some sur-
vivor or some son or grandson of some participant in these
doings might learn through me of long suspected but never
verified treason to the unwritten law of the country-side and
might bloodily avenge it on a surviving helper of mine or on
any such helper's children or grandchildren. The Umbrian
mountaineers are spleenful, tenacious of a grudge and fero-
ciously acrimonious.

I learnt all these amazing facts without difficulty, for slaves,
peasants and yeoman alike assumed that I was of their party
and was heart and soul with the outlaws. I was not subject
to suspicion because I visited the post of the constabulary, be-
came acquainted with every man of them, their sergeants and
their officers and frequented their company. All the yeomen,
peasants and slaves whose abodes were near the post, were,
on the surface, on the best of terms with the road-constables;
pretended to help them with information, retailing to them
as rumors all sorts of inventions calculated to throw them off
the scent of the outlaws, always with an air of the friend-
liest good-will; and loitered, idling about the post, chatting
of local gossip.

I was so entirely trusted that I was taken to the outlaws'
camp and made acquainted with the entire band. Paradox-
ically the members of the band were all hulking burly ruffians
of twenty-five to thirty-five years, whereas their chief, while
big and brawny enough, was inferior in size to any of his
subordinates and younger by six full years than the youngest
of them. To him I was boisterously presented as a brother,
for his name also was Felix. In fact, he was the man since
famous as Felix Bulla, for long the most redoubtable outlaw
in Italy. Then he was hardly more than a lad, for all his
bulk and strength and ferocity. He had been appointed chief
of the band by the King of the Highwaymen in person, who
held him in the warmest regard for his ruthlessness, courage,
skill, and cunning, especially for his cunning, rating him, as I
was told by all the band, and having proclaimed him to them,
as the most subtle and crafty outlaw alive after himself.

Bulla, like everybody else, appeared to take to me and treated me as an equal, after conversing with me for hours at a time. I was always a welcome guest at any of the bandits' camps and they often made me show off my admired powers on fox-cubs, badgers, weasels and other such wild creatures which they or their peasant friends had trapped alive. My ability to tame, handle, fondle and make tractable to anyone such animals appeared a source of unflagging interest and unceasing entertainment to these ruffians.

As I was allowed to dispose of my time as I chose, whenever I was not busy rounding up strayed stock or taming raw colts, I had plenty of leisure to ride about the country-side, make friends, get intimate with the constabulary and the outlaws and idle many of my days as appeared most pleasant. I took full advantage of my partial liberty.

The weather, from my arrival at the Imperial estate, was mostly fine and often glorious. Spring came early and merged beautifully into summer. I enjoyed myself hugely. Besides local peculiarities and the humors of the tacit league to thwart the constabulary and foster the interests of the outlaws, I derived much entertainment from the traffic on the Flaminian Highway. Of course, there were Imperial couriers, travellers of all sorts, and convoys of every kind of goods, long strings of wagons, carts or pack-mules laden with wheat, other grains, wine, oil, flax, charcoal, firewood, ingots of bronze, lead or iron, and countless other commodities on their way to Rome; or convoys of clothing, hangings, furniture, utensils and the like, going northwards from the City.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE OUTLAWS

FROM early spring, however, all this normal traffic was interfered with, delayed, hindered and even totally blockaded by column after column of wains and wagons pass

ng southwards, huge wagons, drawn by six or eight or even en horses or mules or by as many big long-horned white oxen, very wagon laden with a cage or two or more cages containng beasts being conveyed to the Colosseum in Rome. This mazing procession roused my interest as soon as it began to ass; filling, clogging, blocking the highway and continuing ithout intermission day after day, ceasing its movement, ndeed, each night, but making the roadside almost a coninuous camp of teamsters and caretakers, barely half of them leeping, the moiety busy about their draft-cattle or the cages f their charges.

The endless stream of caravans amazed me. I had seen east-fights without number in the Colosseum, but had never nought of the enormous labor and expense incident on the reparations for even one morning's exhibition of, say, a hunred lions and other beasts in proportion. Now I meditated ver the thousands of trappers and other hunters who must our the forests of Dacia, Moesia, Thrace, Illyricum, Panonia, Noricum, Rhaetia and Germany to gather such a suply of beasts for exhibition. I saw wolves, bears and boars by ne thousand, and hundreds of lynxes, elk and wild bulls, both ne strange forest-bisons, unlike our cattle, with low rumps nd high shoulders and their horns turned downwards and rwards, parallel to each other, and the huger and even ercer bulls, much like farm bulls, but larger, taller and ener and with horns incredibly long, so that their tips were hen two yards and more apart. I had no idea of the vast umbers of such beasts which were yearly poured into Rome om all the mountains and forests to the north and east of ne Alps. I was amazed.

Even more was I amazed to see hundreds upon hundreds of ages containing beasts not from northern Europe, but from frica, or even from Asia: lions without number, panthers nd leopards by the hundred, many tigers, antelopes of all inds by scores of each kind, rhinoceroses, and hippopotami n enormous cages on gigantic wains drawn by twelve yoke f oxen: even a dozen huge gray elephants pacing sedately, heir turbaned *mahouts* rocking on their necks.

I knew that the traffic in beasts from the northern forests concentrated at Aquileia and I had a hazy notion that they were customarily shipped from there by sea round Italy and through the straits to the Tiber. My curiosity was excited as to why they were now coming overland instead of going by sea. Still more was I curious as to why these hordes of animals from the south should be traversing Italy from the north.

I asked questions and could get no satisfaction from the natives of the district: slaves, peasants, yeomen, proprietors, overseers, *Villicus* and all, they one and all knew nothing. If they claimed to know, what they alleged merely emphasized their ignorance.

The constabulary knew, but were inclined to be reticent and, when they spoke, were laconic. Yet their briefest utterances contained hints which confirmed the only fact I had elicited from the natives: namely, that this traffic was not only unusual along the Flaminian Highway, but had never been seen on it before; was a complete novelty, even a portent. They also confirmed my impression that few animals destined for beast-fights in the amphitheatres reached Rome overland; as I had thought, practically all had hitherto come by sea and up the Tiber.

Still curious, I made friends with the teamsters. Some were from Ravenna, and even these grumbled at the two hundred and fifty miles as ruinous to their cattle. The animals they convoyed had come overland from Aquileia to Altinum and from there to Ravenna by sea. In this way had come the crocodiles, hippopotami and rhinoceroses.

More teamsters were from Aquileia itself. Some of these with the lighter wagons for the cages containing wolves lynxes, small antelopes, hyenas or African apes, had been able to take the shorter though poorer road by way of Patavium and Ateste to Bononia, which made their total journey under five hundred and twenty miles. But most, including all those conveying bears, boars, panthers, leopards, lions or tigers, had come by the more northerly road through Verona. Those with panthers, leopards or small stags had come from

Verona by way of Hostilia to Bononia and from there southward as did all, making their journey about five hundred and fifty miles; the men conveying cages of tigers, lions, bears, boars, elk, or wild bulls had mostly come from Verona through Cremona; from there some through Regio to Bononia, others through Placentia; and for these their total teaming did not differ much, about six hundred and twenty miles for the ones and ten miles more for the others. Teams jogging wains carrying the heaviest cages containing unusually large elk, boars, bears or bulls, had had to go by way of Milan and had been put to it to keep their teams fit for a journey of over seven hundred miles.

Besides the difference in weight of the loads, chiefly depending on the needed strength of the cages, I found that their divergence of routes was due, in part, to the efforts which the procurator of all this teaming had made to avoid choking the roads. The teamsters averred that they knew nothing as to why the beasts were being brought this way; and no more as to why animals brought all the way from Africa to Aquileia, a voyage far longer than the voyage to Rome, should then be conveyed overland from Aquileia to the Colosseum.

I enjoyed idling about the teamsters' camps chatting with them and the attendants who cared for the beasts. One hot evening, just about sunset, when I was already thinking of riding off home to bathe and dine, while I was lingering to watch his keepers urging their little gang of slaves to pour more and more water over a gasping hippopotamus, there was a yell of alarm all along the line and a scampering, scattering rush of fleeing men; teamsters, attendants and keepers. A panther had broken out of its cage, when a wagon overset.

He came down the middle of the highway, keeping to it, as everyone ran off it to right and left. I had strolled some distance from where I had tethered my horse. Naturally, as I could not mount and dash off, I did not run. I stepped into the middle of the road and faced the beast. Of course, he stopped, stood still and stared at me. I walked towards him, very deliberately, even pausing between paces, till I was an

arm's length from him. He cringed and cowered. I took him by the scruff of his neck, turned him round, led him back to his cage, which was not broken, only jarred open, made him enter it, and closed the door on him.

Thereupon the fugitives flocked back, acclaiming me as a sorcerer. The superintendent of that caravan insisted on my giving him my name. I told him I was Felix, the horse-wrangler of the Imperial estate. He gave me a broad gold piece.

Unable to elicit anything from the natives or the teamsters I resorted to the outlaws. I had been admonished before I saw any of them that it was not according to the etiquette of the district for anyone to ride a horse into the outlaws' camp. If anywhere near it one visited it on foot. If too far one carefully avoided appearing to ride towards it or from it. When the camp, for instance, happened to be south of my cottage I would ride off north, east, or west, fetch a long compass about, tether my horse at least half a mile from the camp, generally farther away, and stroll towards it. On leaving I invariably departed by a path different from that by which I had come. When I reached my horse I was careful similarly to choose a return route which would bring me home some direction other than that towards which I had gone off. Of course, I always observed these precautions since any neglect of them, if known, would have not only made me unwelcome to the brigands, but also gotten me into disfavor with the whole countryside.

When I reached the outlaws' camp I was careful to let them do most of the talking and to wait for the talk to come round to the subject of the beast-caravans. I had not long to wait, and, when I expressed my amazement and curiosity, they showed no reluctance about informing me. Bulla himself explained that Commodus had become so interested in beast-fighting, had developed such transcendent skill at fighting beasts and had grown so infatuated with the sport that he spent most of his time in the arena, displaying his dexterity to invited audiences composed of senators, nobles, nota

bilities and their wives and even children; in which exhibitions he had killed so many creatures that he had not only depleted but had almost exhausted the normal reserves constantly kept at Rome, Ostia and the other Tiber ports. When the procurators in charge of the supplies of beasts for the arena realized that the Emperor was killing his victims faster than they normally were brought in, even lavishly as they had always been provided, they sent out orders urging greatly increased efforts at hunting, capturing, caring for and rapidly transporting all sorts of creatures destined for the Colosseum. The Emperor's killing capacity and love of enjoying and exhibiting his knack so outran their measures that, by the time the increased supply began to come in, the royal sportsman's unerrancy and swiftness outran their best results, so that hasty messages had to be sent to Marseilles, Aquileia, Byzantium, Antioch and Alexandria ordering the instant despatch to Rome, with the utmost speed, regardless of expense, not only of all newly captured beasts as they came in, in contravention of the long-established regulations by which Rome and the provincial capitals shared each variety of animal, but also the concurrent despatch of the local reserves, even the emptying of the beast despositories attached to each amphitheatre. As the voyage from Aquileia to Rome was of variable duration, owing to the uncertainty and shiftiness of the winds, orders had been given to forward all its reserves and supplies, at once, overland. Hence the spectacle which had so excited the countryside and so amazed me. As Commodus was still slaughtering all sorts of beasts daily not only with arrows and spears, to show off his accuracy as a marksman but, even with sword or club, to display his incredible swiftness of movement and unerrancy in directing and timing a blow, he was taxing the capacities of his procurators and their gigantic organization of transports, teams, detention-pens, and hunters merely to stave off the apparently inevitable day when, whatever might run wild in the deserts, forests and mountains, there would be, at Rome, far too few beasts to maintain the autocrat's daily sport.

When I expressed my astonishment at the certainty with which these explanations were uttered and my wonder as to how they came to be so sure, Bulla said:

"Why, our King of the Highwaymen has reliable, capable and secret agents, entirely unsuspected, in every city of Italy. He has a brother and sister in Rome and equally devoted and unfailing helpers in Capua, Aquileia, Milan, Brundisium and Naples. He maintains a road service of swift couriers who bring him promptly all the information collected for him in the cities, where his backers catch every breeze of rumor and are forehanded in getting advance information on all important moves of the authorities as well as in sifting truth from falsehood. Equally prompt are his couriers in disseminating to subsidiary bands like mine whatever he judges we should learn; thus we know more of goings-on in Rome and at Court than do provincial nobles and highway-police."

As I trudged from the camp to my horse, as I trotted homewards, I was despondent. I had no right to be so, for I was merely one of the innumerable slaves held by the *fiscus* as the property of Cæsar. As such I was notably well off. Even in my proper person I congratulated myself on my amazing luck. I was alive, unsuspected, secure, well-housed, well-clad, well-cared for, freer than many a freeman, than many a nobleman, pleasantly busy at occasional tasks very congenial to me and blest with much leisure among a companionable population in a lovely region full of diversified and charming scenery set off by an exhilarating climate; I should have been gay.

Yet my thoughts were those of a Roman nobleman. I was horrified at the state of the Republic. I knew that Italy had never been entirely free from outlaws. Even under Tiberius highwaymen had perpetrated successful robberies and had captured and held for ransom wealthy persons or even notabilities. But under most of the Emperors these outrages had been few and had occurred only in the wilder districts. During the civil wars between Otho and Vitellius brigandage had become rife all over Italy, even up to the gates of Rome, and Vespasian had had much ado to exterminate the out-

ws. Again, under Nerva, bandits had multiplied and pros-ered. But none had ventured into any populous district uring the principates of Trajan, Hadrian and their suc-essors until after the death of Aurelius. Now, because of the egligence of his son, outlaws had so prospered that they had sort of organization among themselves, like a commonwealth nside the Republic, as I had seen during my captivity with Taternus and now glimpsed again in Bulla's revelations. It rgued a horrible disintegration of the governmental mech-nism of the Republic and of the Roman character that such hings had become possible.

Equally horrifying to me was the contemplation of Cæsar's xtravagance. I knew that the Republic's income from all ources was insufficient to keep up the court establishment nd ceremonials at their normal cost; to defray the expenses f the state festivals with befitting magnificence of games in he circuses, amphitheatres and theatres; to maintain the Prætorian guards, city police, road constabulary and frontier arrisons. I knew that all these branches of the necessary tructure of the state were constantly in want of more funds han could be supplied to them. I knew that this want of upplies crippled our commanders along the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine and the Wall, as well as far up the Nile nd in the Euxine and made possible the insolence of the Ethiopians and Caledonians as well as the greater insolence f the Parthians, Goths and Germans.

Yet, when conditions so urgently called for greater ex-enditures along our frontiers and for close economy at ome, I beheld our Prince stinting his commanders and their eroic legions and lavishing upon his own pleasure and the ratification of his amazing vanity sums which would have nabled our eagles not only to defy all assailants of our rontiers but to humble and subdue every threatening foe, ven to penetrate and subjugate Nubia, Parthia and inner Germany. I sickened at the thought of our shame along the rontiers as at the thought of the energies of thousands upon housands of hard-muscled, bold-hearted young men wasted n capturing beasts and the like energies of thousands upon

thousands of hardy peasants who ought to have been busy a
productive labor on farms or in forests or mines, wasted o
caring for and transporting swarms of beasts for Commodu
to kill.

Those thoughts were depressing. I could not banish them

The next day the mood persisted. I had nothing to do, di
not feel like doing anything in particular and yet felt rest
less. The weather was perfect. I set off afoot for a plac
far from my cottage, not far enough to be called a lon
walk, where a big gray crag or small cliff like an inlan
promontory, a spur of a forested mountain, towered up fro
the southeastern side of the Flaminian Highway. At tha
point the road was the boundary of the Imperial estate
the crag lay outside it, and, at that part of its foot which pro
jected farthest, was not a hundred yards from the highway
The mountain rose a thousand feet or more from the meadow
along the road. The crag was full three hundred feet high
It was perfectly possible to toil up the steep wooded slop
of the mountain and walk out on either of two bush-covere
shelves which ran round the crag. From the lower of these
where it belted the front of the vertical cliff, there was
fine view down upon the highway and along it both ways
from the upper more of the highway could be seen; fro
the very top of the crag, which was bare except for two clump
of gnarled trees and starved bushes near its brow, the vie
included a full two miles of the highway in each direction.

I climbed the slope to the lower shelf and esconced mysel
where I was shaded from the sun and had a clear view of th
road both ways. From my coign I watched the traffic.
judged that the northern supply of arena-beasts was alread
overtaxed. The procession of wagons was no longer continu
ous. They came now in trains of a hundred or so with som
miles between the convoys. Just as I settled myself n
beast-wagons were in sight, the road-traffic was normal
An Imperial courier dashed into view from the south, tor
past at full gallop, and vanished northwards; three famil
travelling carriages, also bound north, pulling to the side o

he road to let him pass; as did a train of a score of mules aden with charcoal.

The first sign of arena-beasts which I saw after I settled nyself to watch was a string of eight elephants, each with a urbaned *mahout* rocking on his back, and seven each with is trunk clasping the tail of the elephant before him. This vas the second batch of elephants I had heard of; the former, I had been told, came by way of Ateste, since the elephants ould swim the Po and all the other rivers had strong stone ridges. These looked well after their four hundred mile ramp and fit for the hundred and odd ahead of them.

Before they were out of sight there came into view the ead of a column of wagons which turned out to be loaded vith cages of bears, lynxes, bison, aurochs, elk, wolves and ther northern animals. I watched them pass and meditated. After they were gone the road was normal for a full two ours, during which I pondered the thoughts which obsessed ne and gloomed with shame over the condition of the Empire. I had brought food and water with me and ate about noon, lept an hour or more and woke to watch the passage of two rains of cages full of lions, tigers, leopards and panthers. The second train was overtaken and passed by two Imperial ouriers from the north, racing each other, the former more han a half mile ahead of the latter, and, apparently length- ning his lead. I spent the day on the crag. Also I spent ther days there, sometimes on one shelf, sometimes on the ther, sometimes on the top.

Not many days elapsed before I again visited the outlaws' amp and had another chat with Bulla; not we two alone, or there was always an easy sociability about the bandits nd, if none took part in or broke into their chief's talk, sually two or more lay or sat about listening and sharing ur interview.

In the course of our talk Bulla discoursed of his im- ortance, of the importance of the band, of the warm regard n which he and they were held by their head chief, the King f the Highwaymen.

Some quirk inside my head made me venturesome.

"What is his name?" I queried. "You never name him."

"His orders!" Bulla snapped. "I know his name; not another man of our band knows it. He never uses it and takes great pains to keep all outsiders who know his name from suspecting that he is King of the Highwaymen; and similarly to make sure that all outsiders who know him as King of the Highwaymen get no inkling of his name. If the knowledge got abroad the usefulness to him of his brother and sister in Rome would be destroyed."

I apologized for my question.

"No harm done," Bulla smiled. "I don't have to answer any questions unless I want to, and I don't mind questions from you."

"If you don't," I pursued, emboldened, "perhaps you'll be willing to explain how it can be that your king holds you and your band in such high esteem, whereas, to all appearances, you have not acquired a sesterce-worth of loot since long before I reached this neighborhood; in fact, as far as I can hear, have not succeeded in robbing anyone since you located your camp here?"

"I am perfectly willing to explain," laughed Bulla, looking more formidable when he smiled or laughed than when expressionless. "We are no cheap bandits to rob market-women, poor farmers, ordinary travellers or such small fry. We angle for bigger fish. We bide our time. We are here to make three big strokes and then a quick disappearance. Once we have our hands on our chosen prisoners to be held for ransom we shall be off for the mountain heights and the thickest forests; once we have the booty we hope for, those in charge of it will ride fast and far and get clear out of this part of Italy. Is that intelligible?"

"Entirely," said I, and was mute.

Bulla gazed at me almost genially.

"I don't in the least mind telling you," he said, "just what we are waiting for. Half the countryside knows and are alert to help us all they know how.

"In the first place we have word of a big consignment of

gold on the way to Rome; ingots from the mines in the mountains of Noricum, nuggets and dust washed from the rivers of Dacia and Pannonia and Mœsia. Of course it is in charge of a wary official and has a strong guard, but we have good hopes of getting it. If we do, it will be the biggest haul that any of our bands ever made, and that he has put me here to try for it is proof of my King's esteem for me.

"In the second place a wealthy senator, just the right man to capture and hold for ransom, is coming up from Rome in charge of a big chest of gold coin to be paid out by the administrators of Asia and Macedonia and Achaia. He himself is going out as proprætor of Asia. With him is a wealthy widow, going north to be married at Aquileia, and taking with her a big jewel-chest full of the finest and largest gems in the most magnificent settings. So we have in prospect three prisoners for ransom and three rich treasures.

"The difficulty is that it will be almost impossible to make both captures. If we nab the proprætor and widow, with the coin and gems, the rumor or report of it is almost certain to warn the procurator with the raw gold so that he will elude us. Similarly if we get him, news of our presence will most likely reach and alarm the proprætor and the widow. If one comes ten days or even five before the other we can scarcely hope for complete success. If fewer days intervene we might get both. I am here to get both. The King thinks me capable of the feat. His instructions are that, in case I judge that I can get but one, I am to try for the procurator and his gold, as it is estimated that his gold is worth at least twice the coin and gems together, even adding the possible ransoms of the widow and the proprætor.

"I am hoping they will come only a day apart or even the same day; all our couriers with letters about the progress of the gold convoy and the widow's preparations indicate that they will reach this part of the road at about the same time. They might meet each other right here where we want them together. I keep nursing that hope.

"Now you know as much as you need to know about our plans."

I thanked him and marvelled at his frankness. But, as I rode home, I reflected that thinking me the Imperial slave I appeared, he thought me certain to be secret and, if possible, helpful.

I spent the next day and the next on my crag, watching the fascinating spectacle afforded by the highway.

On the third day the *Villicus* chided me for having told my name to the sub-procurator after I had recaged the panther.

"An Imperial courier has just passed," he said. "He is a close friend of a trusty friend of mine in Rome. Like most couriers he is obliging and will carry letters for his friends, even packets. He dropped here a note for me, warning me that I am likely to lose you. My friend is a crony of some of the upper slaves in the Palace and of others in the Beast Barracks.

"Your manumission, which was urged by the aldermen of Nuceria, has been favorably reported and may be ordered. On the other hand, the procurator in charge of the reserves of arena-beasts has heard of you and vows he must have you for service in or for the Colosseum. I am likely to lose you either way. I don't mind your manumission; I'll wager that I can induce you to stay on as you are. But I am all worked up over the prospect of a requisition for you from the Beast Barracks. If one comes it will be your fault."

I told him I was more stirred up about it than he was; that I should hate to leave him and loathed the very idea of being cooped up in Rome amid fetid cages; caring for lions and such like. We thoroughly understood each other, and he said:

"I'll have to manage to report you killed, if the requisition comes. I'm determined to keep you. I'll have to set my wits to work to arrange for it."

I hoped he might, but I felt nervous. I dreaded being dragged to Rome and recalled the prophecy of the Aemilian Sibyl. I had a feeling that to Rome I was going, my situation was too good to last. I thought of leaving Septima with much regret. Not that I loved her or even cared for her;

but she was a girl no man could but respect and admire and wish well to. If I must leave her I resolved to leave her as well off as I could.

Making sure that I was far from any human being and unobserved I opened my amulet-bag, looked over the gems it contained, selected a medium-sized emerald of perfect color, sewed it into the hem of my tunic and sewed up the amulet-bag with the rest of the gems inside it.

At the first opportunity, I revisited the outlaws' camp, with the usual precautions, and found Bulla idle and genial. I told him I needed cash, all the cash I could get, and had an emerald I thought would be worth a noble store of gold and silver coin.

"Show it to me!" he commanded.

I took out my sheath-knife, ripped the emerald out of its hiding-place and passed it to him.

He conned it.

"You are right, brother," he said; "this is a fine gem. I tell you what I'll do. I'll ride, myself, to Sentinum and exchange this for cash, part gold and part silver. Sentinum seems an unlikely place in which to find a cash purchaser for a gem like this, but our King has a friend there who acts as his agent in several respects; among others he keeps cash in hand to exchange any time for precious loot; especially jewelry. He'll hand me the cash without hesitation.

"But if I am to do it for you, you must agree in advance to accept his valuation of the jewel and to divide with me, share and share alike, whatever he pays me for your emerald. In a case like this I charge half the proceeds of the sale as my commission for making the deal and as my fee for my time, risk and trouble. Do you agree?"

"Certainly," I said, "and I am amazed at your offer. How can you be away three days or more at this juncture? Might not your prizes: procurator, proprætor, widow, jewels, coin and gold all slip through your hands during your absence in my behalf?"

"No fear, lad!" he laughed; "our advices never deceive us. The procurator with his gold is far away and approach-

ing slowly; neither the widow nor the proprætor is ready to leave Rome; both are occupied with endless preparations. I have plenty of time. And it won't take me any three days to reach Sentinum and return. I'll set off at sunset. About the third hour tomorrow I'll be at Sentinum, my mount lathered and blown, but far from used up; about the ninth hour I'll pass out of one of the gates of Sentinum on my return, completely refreshed myself and with my mount fit for the return journey: I'll be here in camp at dawn day after tomorrow, with the coin bags. You can come for your cash any time after the third hour day after tomorrow. Is it a bargain?"

"Done!" said I.

"Then get home," he said. "If I'm to go two nights without sleep I'll give orders now, post my out-pickets and what not and snooze till dusk."

I spent the next day on my crag. Several trains of wagons with arena-beasts passed, but they were farther apart than ten days before. The other traffic on the road was normal.

Next day, not long after the third hour, I was in the outlaws' camp. Bulla I found awake and with no signs of drowsiness or fatigue. In full sight of all of his men he spread a blanket, and, on it placed four coin-bags, two small and two full size. From the larger he spilt their contents on the blanket and, each of us taking a bag, we picked up the silver one piece at a time, both keeping count together There was an odd piece.

"It's yours, lad!" said Bulla. "I've enough here."

The gold pieces similarly spilled and counted, came out even.

"Are you satisfied?" Bulla queried.

"Both with the amount and the division," I replied, "and now I'll be off. You must need sleep."

"Sit still!" Bulla commanded.

He rose and went into his tent, for the outlaws had excellent hide tents. He returned with a fine new coin-belt of pigskin leather.

"Here," he said as he squatted down and handed it to me,

"is a little gift from Bulla. Wear it next your skin. And remember to keep it flat and loose. Many a man has lost his life with his coin in a tight place because a bulging belt betrayed him to greedy ruffians. My lads will respect you, but you may encounter bandits who have no inkling that you are under my protection. Don't attempt to carry too much of your coin about your waist."

I thanked him and tramped off.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE POINT OF VIEW

THAT evening, after our dinner, a perfect dinner eaten under a grape-arbor, lingering over the fruit and honey in the mingled light of waning dusk and a clear crescent moon, I showed Septima my belt and bags, put in the belt what silver would fill it to a flaccid and comfortable flatness, and gave her all the gold and the rest of the silver. I had already explained to her what impended over us, and had emphasized my wish to remain with her and my anxiety to know that she was provided for, if we were to be separated.

I did not visit the post of the road-constabulary as often as the camp of the outlaws. Next day I rode over to their post and chatted with one of the sergeants and several of the men. They were in doubt between two opinions: most held that their presence in the district had frightened the bandits away and that they had left the neighborhood and transferred their attention to a wholly different region; only a few maintained the view that the brigands had been lurking near from before their arrival and that all their efforts had failed to locate their hiding place. I heard nothing which led me to believe that they had any inkling of the location of the outlaws' camp, of their purposes, or of their intended coup.

After a day of happy idling on my crag I visited Bulla. He was gay.

"It promises well," he volunteered. "The procurator and his gold are well on this side of Ariminum and the proprætor and widow left Rome yesterday. They'll be here within two days of each other, if he holds the rate he has kept all the way from Bononia and they travel as such luxurious folks generally do. Come over as often as you like. No one will suspect you or follow you. I'll keep you posted as to what our advices promise us. You may be able to help us."

By this time I was so interested in Bulla and his plans that I oscillated between my crag, the outlaws' camp and the constabulary post, with no more other occupations than what I judged absolutely needful to forestall any unwelcome interest in my doings and the possibility of too many persons knowing of my visits to the outlaws.

When next I visited them Bulla told me that something had alarmed the procurator. Either some rumor of their presence along the road had reached him or he knew of the bad reputation of the stretch of the Flaminian Highway through the Umbrian mountains between Forum Sempronii and Nuceria, which it had acquired some years before when the King of the Highwaymen himself had made on it a succession of valuable captures which had yielded him princely booty and the reports of which had spread all over Italy. Anyhow their advices informed them that he had packed his bullion-chests with stones and old-iron and had parcelled out his packets of dust and nuggets among the wagons of a long train of arena-beasts.

"We'll fool him!" Bulla boasted. "We'll nab him and hold him for a big ransom. Also we'll not only make sure of his bullion chests in case our information is false, or based on an intentional rumor he has given out as a blind; but we'll get that bullion, too, if it is not in the chests, but hidden in the wagons in the guise of dusty packets of provender for the draft-cattle or of meat for the caged beasts. We'll get it!"

From his mention of the wagons we fell into talk of the increasing difficulty of getting fresh meat for the lions and

other beasts, of the depletion of the flocks and herds along the roads from Aquileia to Rome; and he told me that his advices reported that the whole country near the highways was already swept clean of all goats, sheep and cattle, except breeding stock, milch stock and their choicest young kept for breeding. The inhabitants could get no beef, mutton or goats' flesh for themselves; all had gone into the maws of hyenas, tigers, wolves and the rest; and the procurators were insisting on the farmers selling their kids, lambs, calves, ewes and cows-in-milk, any stock, even mules and horses; any animals fit to butcher for lion-food.

From this we came round to chatting of my talks with the teamsters and of my prospect from my crag. I had told Bulla of the crag long before, but he did not seem to have taken in the idea. Now he was delighted.

"If I'd paid attention to you soon enough," he said, "I'd have put in a day or two with you watching the show. It's too late now. Our prayed for chances are coming soon, and not far apart."

Next day he was gleeful.

"It's all going to work out like the end of a theater-play," he said. "The procurator and the proprætor and his charge are practically certain to come along tomorrow afternoon. I calculate that they will meet not far south of your crag. I've planned to post one ambush near the foot of your crag, just south of it, another at a judicious interval down the road nearer Rome. I'll have 'em between the two ambushes about the middle of the afternoon or between that and sunset. We'll nab all three ransom prizes at once and we'll lay our hands on the jewels, coin and gold almost at the same instant. I've arranged to lead the constables off on a false scent about noon and they'll be miles away up a lonely cross-road when we pull off our coup. We'll make our getaway, with the swag, hours before they can get wind of the occurrence and follow on our trail. We'll have a long start of them.

"You can watch the whole thing from your crag. This ideal weather is going to last many days yet. And the moon

will be full two nights from now, so its light will help us two nights on our getaway. I envy you up on that crag watching the show, comfortable as a senator at a theater, aloft like Jupiter on Olympus in the Iliad."

Next day I made sure that the *Villicus* would not want me, had Septima put up for me an abundant supply of her inviting food and set off about the middle of the morning for my crag, on foot, of course. I climbed to the very top and ensconced myself under and among sheltering bushes so that I was certain that I could not be seen from the road in either direction, yet could view it both ways as far as the horizon, except just at the foot of the crag and where, in the distance, hilltops hid the hollows behind them. Close by me I placed my precious kidskin of much watered wine, I might say of water flavored with wine, so that it would keep cool in the thickest shade. The day was hot, clear and still and the rays of the sun fierce. The occasional slight breezes were very welcome.

The outlook was really magnificent; a broad prospect of rolling pasturage, hilly pasturage, and wooded mountains; the grass-lands and grassy hillsides diversified by scattered trees, clumps of trees and small groves; the lower levels of woodland broken by grassy glades; the brighter green of the forests of chestnut, beech, and oak merging imperceptibly into the darker green of the pine-forests; the score of farms in sight brilliant in the green landscapes like semi-jewels; all the wide prospect glowing under a deep blue sky, varied by a very few very white clouds, the intense sunlight beating down on everything. It was a perfect summer day.

I conned the road, on which I saw only the rear of a column of wagons convoying arena-beasts receding over the hilltops to southwards, and the normal traffic, horsemen or two-horse carriages or wagons far apart and few. I dozed.

I must have slept a full hour. I waked hot, but much refreshed, feeling lively and full of interest in what was to come. Just after I waked I saw the constabulary, the officers and about a third of the men on horseback, the rest afoot, come up the road from the direction of their post,

which was south of the crag. The infantrymen tramped their fastest and the mounted men kept pace with them. They were evidently off on their wild-goose chase. As they came into sight below me, after passing my perch, I watched them double-quick northwards and wheel to their right into the first crossroad. They were barely out of sight among the forested hills when I saw momentarily, on the Highway, fully four miles to northward, on a sunlit hilltop, what I took to be the first wagon of a train of teams drawing cages of arena-beasts. I watched the road in that direction. What I saw confirmed my conjecture. Soon the road to northward was filled from its farthest visible hilltop to just below my crag with wagon-teams such as I had many times watched transporting cages of lions, tigers, leopards, panthers and the like. I made out also some cages which I was certain contained hyenas.

Every little while I glanced the other way. Just as the first wagons of the long train vanished from my sight into that section of the road immediately below me where my crag hid it from my view, I saw appear on a hilltop to southwards what I made sure was the travelling carriage of a wealthy noble. I conjectured that it had inside of it the ransomable proprætor. I kept my eyes on the road in that direction, only glancing northward from time to time. One such glance caught a glimpse of a travelling carriage among the beast-wagons; probably the procurator in charge of the bullion.

After I had caught glimpses of it on several successive hilltops the proprætor's carriage was near enough, on one of them, for me to recognize it. Of course, I had known from childhood the travelling carriages of our senate and nobility. As everybody knows, each has a certain unmistakable individuality. Our makers of travelling carriages never make two precisely alike, and, what is more, the tastes of different families are so different that patterns are very unlike. I recognized the carriage for that of Faltonius Bambilio.

Why he was going out as proprætor of Asia so long after

his term as prætor was a puzzle to me. I accepted it as one of the countless eccentricities of Imperial administration under Commodus. The irregularities of the management of the provinces ruled in the name of Cæsar by prefects and procurators had notoriously extended to the provinces ruled by proconsuls and proprætors in the name of the senate. I had always disliked, despised and even hated Bambilio for his pomposity, self-esteem and bad manners. I rejoiced at the opportunity to look on at his capture.

It was by this time past the middle of the afternoon, the day still surpassingly fair and lovely, with few clouds in the sky, a steady light breeze, the mellow afternoon sunlight bathing the world and the sun already visibly declining towards the western horizon.

While I was grinning at my thoughts and watching the advance of Bambilio's carriage, glancing back at intervals at the beast-train and the procurator's coach, I caught sight, on the highway behind Bambilio's carriage, of another travelling carriage of which I had descried no glimpse before, though I must have missed seeing it as it topped several hills further south. When I caught sight of it, it was near enough for me to recognize it at first view.

Vedia's travelling coach!

Between the first and second beat of my thumping heart, I went through an amazing variety of complex, shifting and lucid thinking. And my thinking, multifold and effective as it was, was but as a chip on the surface of a freshet in a mountain gorge amid the torrent of emotions which inundated me.

Since I had begun to mend as the result of the succour and medication of old Chryseros Philargyrus I had resolutely refrained from thinking of Vedia. I had argued with myself that it was impossible for me to forget or ignore the daily and hourly contrasts between my former status as a wealthy nobleman and my present condition as a fugitive always in danger and generally in acute discomfort. Amid the inevitable resultant depression I might keep alive, healthy and sane if I concentrated my thoughts on self-congratulation

at my survival. If I dwelt on my downfall I should lose my wits. If, in addition to thoughts of my loss of rank, wealth, friends and ease I yielded to my inclination to brood over my loss of Vedia, I should infallibly go insane. I resolutely put thoughts of her away. I succeeded in keeping them away. During my winter at the hut in the mountains, during my succeeding adventures, I had not thought of Vedia; thoughts of her had crossed my mind but seldom and fleetingly.

Now, all at once, I was overwhelmed by the realization of how ardently, how unalterably I loved her, how keenly I longed for her, how tenderly I felt towards her. Nothing, past, present or future, mattered to me except Vedia and her welfare. I had been thinking with relished amusement of the dismay of some pampered beauty haled from her luxurious coach and off through the wild mountains, immured in some lonely cave in the forests, guarded by coarse ruffians, reduced to the most primitive diet and bedding, forced to endure all sorts of discomforts, and threatened with death or worse if an enormous ransom were not forthcoming promptly. I had been chuckling at the prospect of getting a far-off glimpse of the first act of this comedy.

My revulsion of feeling was dazing. I was hot and cold with horror at the thought of Vedia's agony, terror and misery and of her danger among Bulla's swarthy, brutal ruffians with their black curly hair and beards intensifying the villainy of their lowering faces, with their mighty hands always close to their daggers. Vedia I must save!

How?

Almost as I recognized her carriage, my eyes, instinctively sweeping my entire outlook, caught sight of Selinus feeding among a small herd of young mares on a hillside midway of the extensive pasture on the other side of the road just to north of my crag. I knew there was, a little to the north of the crag, on the same side of the road, a knoll from which that bit of hillside was plainly visible at no great distance. I had my plan worked out in all its details.

I drank all I could hold of my watered wine, left my

cloak by the kidskin, tucked a small packet of food into my belt-wallet, and raced down the steep slope of the mountain-side to the north of the crag, leaping from rock to rock under the huge forest trees. I reached the gentler slopes near the highway and gained the top of the knoll. Selinus was in plain view, grazing among his brides, and by good luck, all were headed towards me. I stood on the summit of the knoll and waved my arms. Selinus caught sight of me and galloped joyously down the slope of the pasture towards me. When he was near I ran towards him down the slope of the knoll, being careful that he should not lose sight of me. My luck held and he and I approached the highway and each other where there was a comfortable interval between the lion's cage on the wagon which had been passing when I topped the knoll and the leading yoke of the team tugging the wagon next behind. The wind, also, was towards me, so that Selinus did not smell the lions till he and I met in the highway and I had mounted him. Like a hunting dog bounding over a fallen tree Selinus had leapt the tall thorn hedge which bordered the highway to keep stock off it and in the meadow.

Once I was on his back we set off northward at full gallop, which almost at once quickened into a maddened run. He had shied violently as we passed the first cage and he winded the lion in it, but I stuck on him. Also I stuck on at each less violent sideways lurch as we passed cage after cage: tiger, panther, leopard, hyenas or lion; all smelt equally terrifying to him, but he only ran faster and his terror went into speed ahead rather than into leaps aside.

When we reached the crossroad, up which the constabulary had turned, the procurator's carriage was still somewhere up the highway; I had not seen it since I left the top of the crag. The train of beast-wagons seemed endless.

Into the crossroad we turned and up it Selinus tore. I chuckled. No road-police, no matter how young, nimble and long-winded, could maintain a double-quick any distance on that up-slope. Selinus mounted the hills like a grayhound

after a hare. We were sure to overtake the detachment soon. They could not have gone far.

Overtake them we did and the maddened run at which Selinus scaled those steep hills caught their officer's attention. I had rehearsed what I meant to say and wasted no words. What I said conveyed the whole situation to him.

"We are too few horsemen to overcome them," he said, "but we can scare them from their booty and maybe from their captives. We'll ride our fastest and we have time to reach them before they are thinking of flight. The complete surprise will save the jewels, coin and gold and most likely the lady and the officials.

"But you fellows must double-quick after us to support us in case they recover from their amazement, rally and round on us from some near vantage-ground. You can retrace your steps in a tenth of the time it took us to reach here. Race!

"And you, Felix, give me that racer of yours. Fall in with the men. Here Caius, give Felix your saddle and bridle. Your mare is giving out. Felix, saddle and bridle your horse for me. Caius, take my horse."

In a moment I was afoot among the infantry constables, the officer was in the saddle on Selinus, the reins in his hands, and the horsemen were off at a tearing gallop, with us footmen after them at a run which carried us almost by leaps down the steep slope.

When we reached the highway neither the mounted police nor any outlaws were anywhere in sight. But it was plain that more time than I had realized had elapsed since I vaulted on Selinus. Not only was the sun near the horizon, but the bandits had evidently been further up the road than this. For an instant I marvelled that they had come this far at all when both their ambushes were south of the crag. Then I realized that they had been searching the wagons for the bullion. Every wagon was stalled, half were overset, the tongue-yoke of each was hamstrung, every cage was empty, not a lion, tiger or leopard, panther or hyena to be seen; all, apparently, let out that their cages might be ransacked. I conjectured

that letting them out had taken less time than it would have taken to kill them.

Panting, sweating, nearing exhaustion, we hastened along the highway at a jolting run not much faster than the quick walk of untired men, but our best speed. We passed scores of stalled wagons, every cage empty, two hamstrung oxen or mules or even horses lying in agony before each wagon, the rest of the cattle either loosed and gone or held fast by the stalled wagons behind them. We saw not one teamster, not one beast. The long series of stalled wagons, with their hamstrung or stalled cattle and empty cages extended to the foot of the crag and beyond it. Beyond it we came on the procurator's carriage, empty; no horse to it or by it. Still we had seen no human being.

A half-mile further, midway of a flat stretch of road, on one side of which was an expanse of swampy ground, varied with pools bordered by sedge, reeds and bushes, with areas of tussocks and with clumps of willows and alders, we came on Bambilio's and Vedia's carriages, their gilded decorative carvings, coral-red panel-bars, pearl-shell panel-panes, gilded rosette-bosses, silver-plated hubs and gilded spokes and fellies glittering in the late sunshine.

His coach was without any sign of a horse near it, hers with all four hamstrung; their white leather harness, with its gold and silver bosses, horridly stained with the blood they had spattered all over them as they lay struggling and trying to kick. Both carriages were empty, their cushions and mattresses and other contents scattered about on the roadway.

The sun was near setting. Our sergeants, blown as their men and as I, paused and mopped their faces. We scanned the outlook. Far away well up the mountain side we caught sight of a group of burly men, and among them a slender figure clad in a garb of pale lavender hue with the sheen of silk. Below and close a similar group among which were two figures conspicuous for crimson cloaks or the like. Far below and much nearer us we glimpsed the pursuing horsemen.

Off we set, and our fresh excitement seemed to put fresh

vigor into all of us. We ran a full mile straight across pastures and wooded hills towards the point where I had glimpsed Vedia.

The sun set.

The constables ran on, panting, but by no means failing.

I gave out.

The hopelessness of such pursuit took all the heart out of me.

I stopped.

I could not hope to keep up with the excited police. I could not believe that they would give any effective support to their mounted comrades or even that they could overtake the outlaws after sunset in such broken and wooded country, or that any or all of them could rescue any of the prisoners. I shuddered to think of Vedia in the clutches of such ruthless villains. But I could accomplish nothing towards helping her. I turned to slink homewards.

Half way to the spot where we had left the highway I encountered a lion. He did not attack me or menace me and I was not afraid of him. But the sight of him brought to my attention that the light was waning and that I was, for a man afoot, a considerable distance from my cottage in broken country full of escaped beasts of prey. I had never understood my power over all animals, but I had always conceived that it depended on the way I looked to them when they gazed at me. I was totally unafraid of the most ferocious beast by daylight, but by no means comfortable in twilight or dusk, while after dark I had no reason to think that a lion or tiger would prove more tractable to me than to any other man. I felt that I must hasten home, if I was ever to reach it alive. With what breath I had left I ran the rest of the easy downhill path to the highway.

When I reached it twilight had not yet deepened into dusk and I could see fairly well. The four hamstrung horses were struggling pitifully to rise and screaming at intervals. With my sheathknife I put them out of their misery; as also the four pack-mules which lay, similarly hamstrung, in the roadway, behind the carriage.

In spite of my dread of carnivora after dark I examined t
coach and what lay about it on the road. There were t
kidskins, bulging roundly, presumably with wine. Th
covered food hampers, unopened; and, intact, a beautiful lit
inlaid chest, such as ladies have for their combs, brush
ointment-pots and similar toilet articles. From their con
tion I conjectured that the bandits had just commenced
rummage the coach when the unexpected approach of t
mounted constables, whose small numbers they most lik
did not realize, had scared them away.

Reluctant to be off and fearing to remain, I glanced abo
irresolute. In a clump of willows and alders in the mi
of the swampy tract I caught sight of a bit of color out
keeping with anything which naturally belonged there a
suggesting a woman's garment. There was a dryshod w
to that clump of trees and bushes. I threaded it towa
what I had glimpsed. When I was hardly more than h
way from the road to the clump I thought I heard a sob.
made haste.

Nearing the place I saw a young and slender and grace
woman dressed as a slave girl. Somehow the sight of
brought to my mind's-eye vivid recollections of my conval
cent outings in Nemestronia's water-garden. She looked t
rified and yet hesitating to flee from me, as if she feared
swamp. A step nearer I realized that Vedia's maid, a wom
not unlike her in build, as faithful to her as Agathemer w
to me and amazingly astute, had had the shrewdness and a
the time to fool the brigands by exchanging clothes with
mistress in the carriage.

"Vedia!" I exclaimed. "Caia!"

"Castor!" she screamed. "You know me? You call
Caia? Are you a ghost? Are you alive? And that voi
Oh, are you real?"

"Real and alive," I answered. "I am myself. I
Hedulio."

To my amazement there, in the dusk under the willo
among the alders, she gave a half-smothered shriek and

xt instant her arms were round my neck and mine round r, and she was sobbing on my shoulder, repeating:
"Call me Caia again. This is too good to be true."

CHAPTER XXVIII

MOONLIGHT

WHEN our transports had abated a little I was aware that the twilight was deepening into dusk and that ust somehow save Vedia from the roaming wild beasts. I ided her along the twisting track from her hiding-place to road. As we gained it I heard a loud snarl of a lion or er or panther far off towards the crag. We must make te.

I reflected that it would be a very strong and enterprising st, even if a lion, which would break into Vedia's coach en its panels were slid and fastened.

"We are too far from any habitation," I said, "for us to ch any while the light holds. I dare not make the attempt h you among all these freed wild beasts. I should be aid to try it alone in this deepening dusk. The best thing can do is to get inside your carriage, slide the panels and st to them to keep out any inquisitive leopard or lion. th the carcasses of four well-fed horses and as many mules d ready to eat, no tiger ought to be hungry enough to be er after us."

"I had thought that, too," she agreed.

I peered through the open door into the coach, which was my. Then I replaced in it its mattresses and cushions, dia showing me how they fitted and, going round to the er door and opening it, helping me to lay smooth the un-nageable feather-stuffed upper-cushions. She also showed the receptacles for her toilet-box, the food hampers and kidskins. While we were thus busied the almost full

moon rose clear and bright over a distant mountain. I helped Vedia into the coach and she disposed herself at full length on its cushions, sinking into the feathers. I walked round the coach and slid all the panels except the front panel through which the moonlight entered, then I climbed inside, shut and fastened the door, shut the panels, fastened each and stretched out by Vedia, like her with plenty of cushions and pillows under my head and shoulders.

As I fastened the last panels we heard the hunting-squall of a leopard at no great distance. Vedia clung to me, shuddering.

"You have saved me, Caius," she said. "As you did on the terrace at Nemestronia's."

Naturally, for a while, we exchanged kisses and caresses without any intermingled words.

When she spoke she said:

"How do you come to be alive?"

"That," I said, "is thanks to Agathemer and is a long tale. I am faint with hunger and thirst, you yourself should be in need of nourishment and might be the better for it. There should be food in those hampers and wine in the kidskins."

"There is," she said, "and plenty. I am as hungry and thirsty as you, now I am no longer terrified and am recovering from my panic. But I am intensely eager to hear your story. Do begin at the beginning just as soon as you can, and tell it while we eat."

Then she showed me how to dispose the hampers as they were designed to be arranged while the occupants of the coach ate. They were very generously filled with the most luxurious fare: hard-boiled eggs, ham, cold roast pork, sliced thin breast of roast goose, breast of roast duck, young guinea-fowls, broiled whole and cut up, broiled chickens, broiled squabs; half a dozen kinds of bread, a quarter loaf and different sorts of rolls; lettuce and radishes; bottles of oil, vinegar, garum sauce, and other sauces; salt smoked fish; figs both big green figs and small purple figs; a jar of strained honey, several kinds of cakes, and plenty of salt, pepper, othe

relishes, and a lavish provision of knives and of silver, plates, spoons, cups and other utensils.

"Why all this profusion?" I queried. "You have enough here for a party of ten."

"I always have a variety like this," she explained. "I generally have very little appetite on a journey so I tell Lydia to put in all the things she can get which she knows I like. Then something is likely to tempt me."

We feasted by moonlight, while I told my story from the moment when I had received her warning letter.

"I knew that you mounted the horse in front of Plosurnia's Tavern," she said, "but I have never heard of you after that. Tanno and I did all we could to find out what had become of you; all we could without risking the secret service getting an inkling that we had a hope that you were not dead.

"In fact it was not only advertised from the Palace in due course, but circumstantially reported to us privately, that the secret service had learned that you had arranged for a fishing-vessel to take you to sea from Sipontum. They had then set three detachments of Prætorians to intercept you, one on each road, with watchers to warn them if you were recognized. You were seen or betrayed somewhere between Hadria and Auximum, one account said at Ortona, and the Prætorians killed you.

"Tanno said that the secret service always gave out such an account if they failed to locate and capture any man they should have arrested. But the confirmation of the story by three different private agencies plainly destroyed his hopes that you might still be alive. I tried to keep on hoping, but, after a whole year, I stopped lying awake and sobbing in the dark; while I felt more grief for you than I ever felt for Satronius Patavinus and more truly widowed than when he died, I ceased to grieve and regained my interest in gaieties and suitors. Don't you think that was natural?"

"Very natural," I admitted and went on with my story.

The moon rose higher and its rays no longer struck on our faces, but, striking through the open panel, diffused from

what part of the cushion or sides of the coach they fell on directly, lit up the whole interior with a pearly glimmer. By this subdued light Vedia looked bewitchingly charming and coquettish, all the more because of the contrast between her elaborate coiffure and the simple costume her maid had worn.

I ate liberally and with relish and she appeared to enjoy her food as I did.

"You don't seem a bit worried," I remarked, "over the loss of your jewels."

"Loss!" she exclaimed. "I haven't lost them, they are all in the secret compartment under us inside the coach body, just where Lydia put them before we left Rome. The bandits had barely begun to ransack the coach when we heard the yells of the constabulary and then the hoof-beats of their horses. They and their horses made so much noise that the brigands thought they had to do with a hundred or more and fled, dragging off Bambilio and Lydia and leaving me and the hampers, even the wine-skins. They never were near laying hands on those jewels. They had Bambilio's coin-chests, to be sure; but not my jewelry nor so much as a nugget of the bullion they had expected. They were preparing to torture the procurator to make him reveal the hiding place of his bullion, when the yelling and galloping horsemen scared them away."

I congratulated her and we ate with even more relish. Both of us, however, were sparing of the wine, though I gloated at the savor of the first really good wine I had tasted for more than two years.

And garum sauce! I had not realized how I had craved such luxuries as garum.

I told my story to an accompaniment of Vedia's exclamations. She was amazed at all of it; at our crawl through the drain, at the loyalty of old Chryseros, at my involvement with Maternus, at my encounter with Pescennius Niger, at my involvement with the mutineers; but most of all, at my having been present in the great circus, an eyewitness of the most spectacular day of racing Commodus ever exhibited

nder his transparent pseudonym of Palus and his last day f public jockeying; and, equally, at Agathemer's device by hich we survived the massacre.

We had finished our leisurely meal and I had finished my tory, neither our appetites nor the flow of my narrative arred by the distant squalls of leopards and roars of lions, or by the uncanny sounds made by the hyenas, when, all of sudden, a lion uttered a powerful and prolonged roar within dozen yards of us. Vedia shrieked and clung to me, clutchng me so I had to remonstrate with her in order to be able slide shut and fasten the open front panel. I had barely astened it when another roar as loud, sudden, and long nswered the first from the other side of us, somewhere in ne swamp tract. This time Vedia did not shriek, she only lung closer to me. I held her as close as she held me and, clinging to each other, in the pale glimmer of the moonght striking on the shell panes in the panels, we listened to epetitions of the roars, each time nearer, till the two beasts ere roaring at each other not much more than its length rom the carriage, apparently facing each other across the ead pole-horses. I expected a fight, but they ceased roaring, nd, by the sounds they made, fell to gorging themselves on orse-meat.

When we had become used to their proximity, since, after a apse of time which seemed like half an hour or more, they ept on crunching and rending without any roarings and ithout coming nearer the carriage, Vedia, her arms still bout me, told me the story of her doings since my downfall. Most of it was taken up with social gaieties and with rejecons of tolerated suitors.

Then she, shyly, told me of her liking for Orensius Pacullus, f Aquileia, and her promise to marry him. She explained t length why she had been called imperatively to Aquileia, hy he felt bound to remain there and how it was that she ad agreed to travel to Aquileia to be married there, instead f his returning to Rome, which would have been the most onventional arrangement.

While she was telling me this we heard not only the noise

of the feeding of the two lions which were eating the dead horses, but heard also a third animal as noisily tearing at one of the dead mules behind the coach.

"I cannot believe," she said, "that I ever consented to marry anybody else, even when I was certain you were dead. But you know, Caius, it is natural to be married; and to live alone, as maid or widow, is not only lonesome and unnatural, but unfashionable and absurd.

"But, now that I know you are alive, I shall not care who thinks me ridiculous or who calls me silly; I shall feel lonely, but lonely merely because I cannot live with you. I shall jilt poor dear Pacullus, who is as good a man and as good a fellow as ever lived, and I shall stick to my widowhood until I die or Commodus joins the company of the gods and we can arrange for your full rehabilitation and the restoration of your estates and rank."

Just as she said this we distinctly heard clawing and snuffing against the panels behind our heads, opposite where the lions were feasting. Vedia did not shriek, she was too scared to make any sound: she merely clutched me closer.

Both lions roared in front of the coach; a tiger's rasping yarr answered from behind it and almost instantly there were noises alongside the coach indicating that a lion and tiger were at grips; growls, snarls, more growls and more snarls each choked off in the middle as it were, half swallowed and left unfinished. For some reason the noise of the fight immediately started a chorus of hyenas, emitting their strange cries, much like human laughter, but the laughter of maniacs. Our situation and environment was to the last degree uncanny.

The fight lasted no long time. We could not conjecture which combatant was victorious, but they dashed off, one pursuing the other. The remaining lion roared twice; long choking, snarling torrents of thunderous noise; then it also went away. Except for distant snarls, squalls and roars, we were in a silent moonlit world, almost peaceful. I ventured to unfasten the other front panel and slide it a little way open. The rays of the high moon poured

in on our feet, we looked out on a magical prospect.

Vedia put a relishing warm arm round my neck.

"Call me Caia again," she whispered. "Where you are Caius I am Caia!" *

The implication thrilled me. It was as if we were married, had been man and wife for long past.

It may have been midnight, was near midnight when she said:

"I don't want to go to sleep at all. We can do without one night's sleep. We can sleep tomorrow night, when we are not together. Let's try to keep awake every minute till daylight."

In fact it was not easy to sleep, for a pack of hyenas, apparently as friendly with each other as if they had hunted together since they were weaned, came and picked the bones of the horses and mules, even ate the bones, which cracked loudly between their powerful jaws. The noise of their gluttony would have kept awake a pair sleepier than we.

But, when the moon was almost half way down the sky, when the roars and squalls and snarls of lions and leopards and tigers and the horrid laughter of hyenas had ceased to sound, when the night silence was so complete that we could hear the cocks crowing near distant farmsteads and the faint breezes rustling in the willows, we did sleep, she first, her arms round me and her head on my shoulder.

When we woke, with the slanted moon rays on the back corner of the coach behind me, she cuddled to me luxuriously, patted me and presently whispered, in a bantering, roguish tone which I detected even in her softest whisper:

"You remember that old sweetheart of yours?"

"I don't remember any sweetheart except you," I retorted. "I never had any sweetheart except you."

"I mean," she said, "that minx who made eyes at you and all your country neighbors and certainly tried to marry you and most of your Sabine friends."

"You mean Marcia?" said I.

"Ah," she said, playfully and teasingly, "I thought you

* From the Roman marriage-ritual.

would remember her name. If you remember her name you must remember her."

"Of course I remember Marcia," I said. "How could I forget her after the way she led my uncle by the nose, had half the countryside mad for her, set us all by the ears, rebuffed Ducconius Furfur, and married Marcus Martius?

"If I had never known her before I'd be bound to recall the creature who embroiled me with you. My! You were in a wax!"

"I certainly was," she whispered, "and I thought I had reason to be indignant. But now I believe your version of her relations with you and feel no qualms at recollecting the slanders I then credited. But, the point is, you remember her."

"My dear," I said, "if I had never set eyes on Marcia except when I encountered her in the Baths of Titus the day you rescued me from drowning when I fainted in the swimming pool, I'd remember her for life. She is too beautiful to forget."

"Am I so hideous?" she demanded.

"You are the loveliest woman alive," I vowed. "But Marcia is amazingly spectacular and the pictures she makes impress themselves on one's memory and eyesight. I could never forget her in that brilliant tableau on the camp-platform facing the mutineers, even if I had never seen her before."

"I was coming to that," Vedia said. "Marcia, who was a foundling and a slave as the adopted child of a slave, has risen so high that she is truly Empress in all but the official title. She has all the honors Faustina or Crispina ever had, except that she keeps out of those religious rites, participation in which is confined to women married with the full old-time ceremonies and observances."

I then told her what Agathemer and I had heard about Marcia while domiciled with Colgius, and of the absence from all talk about her of any mention of or allusion to Marcus Martius; I asked if she knew what had become of him or, indeed, anything about him.

"Oh, yes," she said, "all Roman society knew the main facts and dear old Tanno supplied me with many of the intimate details. Commodus made a point of having Martius specially presented to him because he had heard that he had been, with you and Tanno, one of the foremost fighters in your affrays in Vediamnum and near Villa Satronia. At his private audience he congratulated and bepraised Martius and acclaimed his prowess. Martius, who seems to have been a very fine fellow, disclaimed any pretensions to such laudations and modestly stated that he had, at the beginning of each fight, been far in the rear in your travelling-coach, with Marcia; that she had clung to him and so delayed his getting out; that each time he had gotten out and picked up the staff of a disabled combatant, but that, in each combat, he had arrived barely in time to land a few blows on some of the routed enemy; that in neither affray had he done any real fighting or been in any danger or performed any exploits.

"Commodus, in his blunt way, had asked whether he was good for anything, anyhow. Martius had replied that he was considered more than a mediocre horse-master.

"Commodus had then invited him to demonstrate his prowess in the Stadium of the Palace. There Martius had shown such skill, courage, agility, judgment, grace and ease that Commodus was delighted. He had Martius ride a number of wild, fierce and unmanageable horses and was more and more charmed with him.

"Next day he had another batch of intractable mounts for him. As Martius was manœuvring one which he had almost subdued Commodus stepped too near the plunging brute and, in saving the Emperor from being run down and trampled, Martius was somehow thrown and his neck broken.

"Commodus was very penitent, felt that he had caused Martius' death, had him given a funeral of Imperial magnificence and, as soon as her grief had quieted enough, paid Marcia a ceremonial visit of condolence, as if she had been the widow of a full general killed in battle on the frontier.

"One sight of Marcia was enough. Within a very short

space of time her wiles had ensnared him and Crispina raged in vain."

Then she told me all the story of the intrigues by which Marcia poisoned the Emperor's mind against the Empress until Crispina fell under all sorts of suspicion in the eyes of Commodus; of how at the same time Marcia subtly laid snares for Crispina and enticed her into injudicious behavior with several gallants, until finally the Emperor put her under surveillance, later relegated her to Capri, then to some more distant island, and finally had her brought back to Rome publicly tried, convicted and executed.

I told her my conjectures as to the queer outcome of the arrest of Ducconius Furfur and as to who Palus really was and who occupied the throne while Palus exhibited himself as wrestler, boxer, charioteer and what not.

"I know nothing to confirm your surmises," she said, "but we about the Court have often been puzzled at the way Commodus appeared to be in two places at once. You set me thinking."

After the second cockcrow, since dawn was not now far away, we fell to talking of the future.

"I shan't marry anybody, ever, except you, dear!" she promised, without my asking it and again and again: "I'll remain a widow until I die unless we outlive Commodus, and Tanno and I succeed in having you rehabilitated. I have many consolations in my wealth and social position and friends."

"And suitors," I put in, mimicking her tone when she bantered me about Marcia.

"And suitors!" she replied. "Caius, I love you, and I'll never marry anyone else, but I do love attention. I love to keep a dozen good catches dangling about me; their wooing and their gifts and their behavior generally are no end of good fun. And it's good fun to have half the marriageable belles furious with me. I cannot help encouraging any man or even lad, who moons about after me. But you have never

had any reason to be jealous, you have none now, you never will have."

I expressed my faith in her the best I could.

"You are a dear, dear boy," she said, "and it is good of you not to be jealous, even when you have so little reason to be jealous. I have much more. Suppose I raged about Nebris or Septima?"

I tried to change the subject and succeeded, when I suggested that we must plan what we were to do at dawn and in the future. After a full discussion and the airing of her ideas and mine, we agreed that there was little or no likelihood of the road-constables returning or of anyone else approaching her carriage before full daylight. As soon as there was sufficient light for it to be safe, I would open the panels enough for us to keep watch up and down the highway and in the direction the constables had taken. When we saw them returning I was to wait till they were near enough to assure her safety and then, at the last moment, I was to slip out on the other side of the coach. That was next the swamp and I could be out of sight among the willows and alders when less than two score yards from the road; also I knew the path across the swamp and could cross it and go off home through the meadows and pastures beyond it. This was our plan.

She said she would, whenever the road-constables returned, behave as if she had been alone in the coach all night. She had no doubt that the police would give her every assistance in their power.

"Of course," she said, "my intendant galloped off somewhere, somehow and the coachman and outrider and mule-drivers ran away; you couldn't expect any or all of them to make a stand against all those armed brigands. If the constables return, as they will, all my men will come back. Osdarus will manage to get me horses from the nearest change-station or somewhere else, somehow. Once at an inn I can get fresh horses. I can buy a team at Nuceria."

"Can you pay for a team?" I interrupted. "Have you the cash?"

"My gold and silver," she laughed, "are in the other secret compartment. The outlaws did not get my coin any more than my jewelry. Why look! Lydia's earrings are in my ears now and her necklace round my neck and her bracelets on my wrists and her rings on my fingers. The rascals were so sure of not being interfered with and so much at ease that they were startled frantic by the galloping horsemen and scuttled off with Bambilio's coin-chest, dragging him and poor Lydia and totally forgetting me, thinking me the maid, not even noticing these little trinkets, which are mostly silver and some of gold and so worth stealing.

"I have the cash to pay for two teams or three: I brought plenty for the journey to Aquileia, because we could learn little of the state of the roads beyond Bononia and I thought I might have to travel by Placentia or even by Milan. I'll get back to Rome, as fast as I can. I don't want to be married now, so I don't want to go on to Bononia, let alone all the way to Aquileia. If I did want to go on, the bandits have run off with my maid, and I could hardly get along without her, and they have also removed my escort, and I certainly could not keep on without a proper escort. I have every excuse for turning about at once and making haste to get out of this dangerous neighborhood and getting back home.

"Poor Lydia! I hate to think of her at the mercy of those brutal ruffians. They may maltreat her horribly if they discover that they have the maid instead of the mistress, and by the maid's device. I'll tell everybody I see that I'll pay any ransom in reason, even beyond reason, for poor Lydia, if the brigands will restore her to me safe and sound. I fancy their friends hereabouts, and almost every inhabitant of the district is a friend of theirs, by your account, will speedily have conveyed to them the news that their capture is worth almost as much ransom as they hoped to extort for me. That news ought to protect Lydia while she is among the outlaws and ought to help me to get her back without much delay,

"As soon as I am in Rome I'll send a trusty agent up here to set on foot negotiations with the outlaws and to rescue Lydia by paying what they ask for her.

"And, the moment I reach Rome I'll set in motion all the forces I can control or enlist, and I can influence many men in high places, I'll have all I can influence working quietly and most unobtrusively for that official manumission of yours. Once you are free you had best travel secretly and without haste to Bruttium. No folk are more secretive or more loyal than the herders and foresters of Bruttium. Not only your former slaves on your uncle's estate there, but all their neighbors will do as much to keep secret your presence among them, and shield you and to make you comfortable and happy as the Umbrians hereabouts have been doing to help and protect Bulla and his band and to shield them from the constabulary and authorities. In Bruttium you can lurk in safety as long as Commodus lives and it will even be safe for us two to exchange letters. In Bruttium it can be arranged that no secret-service agent or Imperial spy can ever get wind of your existence, let alone of your hiding-place. You can be free, in a way, housed comfortably, with no duties, able to pass your time as you please, and well cared for. Tanno and I will see that you are supplied with cash for the journey and for your needs after you reach your haven."

The cocks crowed vociferously at all the neighboring farmsteads and we could hear them plainly across the considerable distances from us to each. The moon hung low and the pale first light of day began to overcome the moonlight.

Vedia petted me and I petted her and she repeated her vows of unalterable fidelity to her pledge to marry no one else and to hope to marry me.

As dawn brightened the hyenas burst into a belated chorus and a lion roared far away. After that the beasts made no sounds which came to our ears.

Vedia insisted on my eating more of her delicacies and, I confess, I ate liberally and with relish. A night with

almost no sleep and much excitement causes an unnatural hunger at dawn and the delicious rarities tempted me.

She explained, over and over, that I was to behave precisely as if we had not encountered each other and be sure not to mistake some secret-service agent for her emissary. The watchword was to be, in memory of that used at my escape from Rome, that whoever came from her or Tanno to me would ask:

"Can you direct me to the leopard-tamer who rode the horse with the blue saddle-cloth?"

I was to reply:

"The blue saddle-cloth was bordered with silver."

He was then to respond:

"I have silver for the leopard-tamer."

I was then to say:

"I am the leopard-tamer and I have a pouch for your silver."

After we had rehearsed the passwords till both were sure neither could forget or misplace a word, as the day was coming on, we kept a keen lookout through the partly opened panels. Before sunrise I saw the mounted constables approaching down the mountain trail, for there were several points on it where horsemen could be seen through the trees, even from where we were.

I unfastened the coach door next the swamp, we kissed each other again and again, and, as the horsemen came in sight away across the meadows where they emerged from the woods, we exchanged a last farewell kiss and I slipped out and across the swamp.

BOOK IV

DISSIMULATIONS

CHAPTER XXIX

FELIX

FROM the marsh my path homewards led me past the villa, for it was directly between my cottage and the swamp. The very first human being I encountered was the *Villicus* himself.

"Hullo, Felix," he said. "I've been looking for you. We need you. Septima says she hasn't seen you since early yesterday. Where have you been all night?"

"Up a tree," I replied. "Bulla told me day before yesterday that he and his lads planned a spectacular capture and robbery on the highway south of Diana's Crag for yesterday afternoon. Most of the days lately on which you haven't wanted me I have spent on top of the crag, watching the traffic on the road. I went up there about the third hour yesterday morning, to view the show Bulla had promised me. I expected to enjoy it, but, somehow, when I saw the victims' coaches come in sight, the idea of a Roman lady in the clutches of Bulla's gang went against my gorge. I ran down alongside the crag towards where Selinus was grazing in the roadside pasture. He came to me and I galloped up the highway and up the first crossroad to warn the constabulary, who had gone up that road about noon on some false information given them by someone at Bulla's suggestion. Their officer took my horse and I had to run with the infantrymen. My breath gave out and my legs too and I dropped behind when they left the highway south of the crag and struck off across country after the bandits, who had been scared off by the cavalrymen. It took me a long time to get my breath and rest my legs. When I felt able to walk it was after sunset. I can gentle any beast by day-

light, but after dusk I'm no better off than any other man facing a lion or tiger. The brigands had opened scores of cages and the freed beasts began to roar and snarl soon after sunset. I climbed a maple and spent the night in a fork about six yards from the ground, where I felt safe as long as I could keep awake. I dreaded to fall if I dozed, and I was frightfully drowsy after such a hot day and such a long run. When the sun rose I started home."

"Come along, prudent youth," he said, "we need you. The sub-procurator in charge of the beast-train which the brigands interfered with is at the villa: so are half his beast-tenders and teamsters. The animal-keepers vow they dare not attempt to recapture their charges and the procurator is angry and worried and anxious about his responsibility and what will be expected of him by his superiors. He does not want to lose one single lion or tiger or even hyena; wants them recaged at once. So do I. I've lost more stock than I like to think of. The hyenas and panthers and leopards have slaughtered a host of my sheep and goats, and the lions and tigers have banqueted on some of my most promising colts and on many of my cattle.

"Can you duplicate your feat with the panther loose on the highway?"

"I can repeat it as often as I can get anywhere near any of those beasts by daylight," I said. "Let us start at once. There is no hurry, for the beasts will do little damage in daytime, as most of them will hide till dark. But there seems to be a large number loose; I doubt if I can catch all of them before dusk."

"It'll take you two days, Felix, or three," the *Villicus* laughed. "The procurator states that his train had in its cages twenty-five panthers, as many leopards, fifty tigers, a hundred lions and two hundred hyenas. That's four hundred beasts for you to catch as fast as they can be located by their keepers, assisted by my whole force of horse-wranglers, herdsmen, shepherds, and the rest and all the farmers hereabouts, and all their slaves. We'll have plenty of help. Three farmers are at the villa now raving over the loss of

sheep or cattle; every farmer will turn out with his men to help us; anyhow, every bumpkin and yokel will want to enjoy the fun and they'll all flock to the scene."

I do not know how many days I spent catching the escaped beasts for the procurator. I enjoyed the first day, did not mind the second and was not painfully weary on the third; but the rest passed in a daze of exhaustion; though I had good horses, a fresh horse whenever I asked for it, wine and good wine as often as I was thirsty, plenty of good food and every consideration; and although the various farms at which I spent the nights (for we did not once return to the villa) did all they could for my comfort, the repetition, for hundreds of times, of dismounting, approaching a lion or tiger in his daylight lair among reeds or tall grass or bushes, catching him by the mane or the scruff of his neck, leading him to his cage and caging him, was extremely, even unbelievably exhausting.

Whenever any of our searchers located a beast in hiding the teamsters drove their wagons with his cage as near as might be; in no case did I lead a cowed captive half a mile; seldom two furlongs. But I walked a great distance in the course of each of these days, rode many miles in the course of all the riding I did between recaptures, and was never calmed between my recurrent periods of tense excitement. I felt limp.

My condition was not improved by the occurrence and recurrence of perturbing excitement from a more disquieting cause. Early on my third day of animal-catching, just as I stepped back from bolting the door of a cage on a lion, I felt rather than saw out of the tail of my eye someone rush towards me from behind, trip when a few yards from me and fall flat. I whirled to look and beheld a mere lad, one of my fellow-slaves at the villa, a stable cleaner, scrambling to his feet. When he was half up the man nearest him, another of my fellow-slaves, an assistant colt-wrangler, apparently the man who had tripped him, dealt him a smashing blow on the ear with his clenched fist and felled him again. As he went down I saw that he had a long-bladed,

keen-edged, gleaming dagger in his right hand. It flew from his grasp as he plowed up the ground with his face. The colt-wrangler picked it up.

We were on a crossroad, some distance from the highway, in the woods. The wagon and cage were surrounded by almost a score of the slaves of the estate, with nearly as many more helpers; farm-slaves, farmers, teamsters, beast-warders, yokels and stragglers; the *Villicus* was near.

"Napsus," he said to the colt-wrangler, "kill him with his own dagger!"

Instantly Napsus stabbed the fallen lad between the shoulders. The thrust went home neatly, under the left shoulder-blade, deep and inclined a little upward. It must have reached his heart, for he died after one violent convulsion which threw him into the air, and turned him completely over, his corpse slapping the ground like a flopping fish on a stream-bank.

"Hand me that rope!" the *Villicus* ordered a teamster.

He knotted a hangman's noose at one end of the rope, tried it to make sure it worked properly and ordered the estate slaves to hang the body to a convenient limb of a near by tree. They did.

I stood, gazing questioningly, first at the swinging corpse, then at the *Villicus*.

"Felix," said he, "I perceive that you do not understand. Tiro meant to kill you, and would most likely have succeeded had not Napsus first tripped him and then killed him. Napsus shall be handsomely rewarded in every fashion within my power. Tiro has been dealt with as he deserved, as any similar fool deserves. I propose to protect you to the extent of my abilities and authority, which includes peremptory execution of any estate slave whom I so much as suspect; I don't have to wait for any overt act, nor for any threat, uttered or whispered or hinted. You can rely on all the protection I can give you and I fancy it will suffice. If there is any other fool about let him take notice."

He spoke loudly, so as to be audible to everyone of the gathering.

I stared numb, puzzled, almost dazed.

"But," I blurted out, "why did he try to kill me? Why should anyone want to kill me?"

"You don't know Umbria, lad," spoke the *Villicus,* indulgently. "Many eyes in addition to those of the teamsters and beast-wardens beheld you on Selinus, galloping your fastest northwards along the highroad. Many saw you turn Selinus up the crossroad the *viarii* had taken. Many saw their officer on Selinus when the cavalrymen charged down the highroad and scattered the bandits. Many saw you afoot among the infantrymen when they turned from the crossroad into the highway and as they double-quicked down it. Every partisan of the outlaws blames you for their discomfiture, and regards you as a detestable traitor, many a one is looking for such a chance at you as Tiro thought he saw. I'll give you a body-guard of men I can trust, for the rest of this beast-catching job. But keep a bright look-out, yourself. You may need all your own strength and quickness to save yourself."

The strain of this surprise and anxiety was a hundredfold as trying as the most daunting beast-catching. I felt it.

I felt it more after a second similar attempt that very afternoon. I had threaded a dense patch of undergrowth, approached a lurking leopard, caught her and led her out of the thicket, led her almost to her waiting cage. By this time our helpers were so used to seeing me cage lions, panthers, leopards and tigers that they no longer, as at first, hovered at a distance, gaping at me as I, completely alone with my catch, led it towards its cage, set ready by its wagon, from which the team had been loosed and removed: no longer drew off some yards beyond the cage and wagon and stood ready for instant flight if my capture escaped me; they now merely drew aside as I approached and opened a lane for me and my charge, no more afraid than if I had been leading a calf.

As I drew near the cage, my mind intent on the leopard and my eyes on the open cage door and its fastenings, a slave of one of the neighboring farmers dashed at me, sheath-knife

uplifted. He came from my left side, from a little behind me. I whirled round to face him, pulling the leopard round roughly, so that she snarled. I let her go. She was face to face with my reckless assailant and they were close together. She gave one joyful, gloating, triumphant squall and one mighty leap. Her claws sank into his shoulders, her long white fangs met, horridly crunching, in his throat, and she bore him to the earth where she crouched flat on him, greedily gulping his blood.

The bystanders fairly fell over backwards in their panic as they scattered. I stood by the leopard, and when she had exhausted the supply of hot blood, succeeded in caging her; but dropped limp on the earth once I had fastened her in her cage, for a beast of prey which had just tasted human blood was a ward with which I had felt very uncertain of being able to cope.

After that no one attempted to molest me while out catching the escaped beasts. But the night before my last day of beast-catching, as I lay abed very fast asleep at a villa fully ten miles from the Imperial villa where I belonged, I became gradually aware of some noises, then slowly I wakened. There was a fight going on at my door. Soon after I got out of bed our host and my master, the *Villicus,* came with a light and three or four slaves. The light revealed one of my fellow-slaves flat on his back and another throttling him. A dagger lay on the floor. Evidently the one had saved me from the other.

Late next afternoon, far up in the hills near Helvillum, I caught and caged the last hyena. These, being smaller and more cowardly than the nobler animals, were harder to locate. It was after sunset when we reached the villa where we found the procurator in charge of the beast-train; and along with him and his men were welcomed and entertained.

After our bath and a lavish dinner the *Villicus* exchanged a few whispered words with our host and then he and I had a long conference alone. He explained that my life was in danger, not only from local friends of Bulla and partisans of the King of the Highwaymen who all not merely regarded

ıe with detestation and hatred as a traitor but suspected ıe of being a government spy, but also from the King of ıe Highwaymen himself, who was certain to be informed y Bulla of how they had been discomfited and who had a ɔng arm and countless capable and intrepid agents. He was f the opinion that the three attempts at assassination which had escaped were a mere beginning. He was emphatic that could not remain on the Imperial estate and survive many ays. He advised me strongly not to return to the villa.

Then he told me that the procurator of the beast-train ad sent to Rome by an Imperial courier, whom he had ıanaged to intercept at a change-station, a letter setting orth my powers over fierce animals and asking that an rder be sent for my transfer from the horse-breeding estate ɔ the Beast Barracks attached to the Colosseum, where the nimals are housed from their arrival in Rome, until their ısplay in the arena; that this letter had come into the ands of the same officials who already had under considera-ion the requisition for me made by the procurator in charge f the Beast Barracks; that somehow these same officials ap-ɐɐred to know nothing of my identity with the slave who ıad foiled the conspirators who were fomenting a mutiny n the *ergastulum* at Nuceria, and for whose manumission a equest had been made by the aldermen of that town, and ndeed appeared to know nothing of any such request for ıanumission; that a requisition for my transfer from the ıorse-breeding estate to the Beast-Barracks at Rome had been ıade out, approved by the higher officials, sealed, stamped ınd sent out by an Imperial courier and received that very ıfternoon by the procurator of the beast-train, who conse-ıuently had authority to take me to Rome with him as one ɔf the attendants on the animals of his train, which was ıow again in order, I having recaged all the four hundred ɛscaped beasts, except five hyenas, one panther and one lion vhich had been killed by stock-owners and their slaves while ıttacking stock.

The *Villicus* went on to say that this fell out very advan-ɛageously for me, in his opinion. He advised me not only

to go with the procurator without demur, but to arrange wi
him that I drop the name of Felix and adopt some oth
He pointed out that, if it was known that Felix the Hors
wrangler of Umbria had gone to Rome as Felix the Bea
Tamer, then the King of the Highwaymen would be ab
without difficulty to trace me and set on me his ruthle
agents until one of them assassinated me.

I felt that he was right. The danger to my former se
as Andivius Hedulio, implicated in a conspiracy again
Cæsar, appeared now far off and unimportant, in spite
the fact that the secret service might still be keen to cat
me and the hue and cry out after me from the Alps
Rhegium; the danger to my present self from the enmi
of Bulla, of his ruffians, of their partisans in Umbria,
their Chief, the King of the Highwaymen, whoever he mig
be, appeared close and menacing. A change of name wou
make it impossible for Tanno and Vedia to carry out h
plan for my manumission by the *fiscus*, my clandestine jou
ney to Bruttium and my comfortable and unsuspected secl
sion there until some other prince succeeded our prese
Emperor. I had grasped eagerly at the thought of th
plan and had built much on it. But I realized that Bulla
admirers or the agents of the King of the Highwaymen wou
make an end of me long before Vedia's influence could obta
my manumission; and that, if she did accomplish all sh
expected, I could never hope to escape the vigilance of th
tenacious and expert pursuers who would inevitably d
my footsteps.

I thought the advice of the *Villicus* good. I regrett
that I was not to say farewell to Septima; she deserved
most fervent expression of my esteem, gratitude, rega
and good wishes; but, after my encounter with Vedia, Se
tima seemed of very little importance. I had my amule
bag on its thong about my neck and my coin-belt about m
waist. I agreed to go with the procurator and thanked th
Villicus for his solicitude for me, for his good offices an
for his advice.

He said that it would be best that he should not kno

what name I meant to adopt. Also he said that, if I was o escape the vengeance of the King of the Highwaymen, t would be imperative that I be thought dead; he would ive out that I had been killed by one of my fellow-slaves nd everybody would assume that I had perished at the ands of some partisan of the outlaws; Bulla and the King f the Highwaymen would feel their animosity satiated.

I reflected that whereas news of my supposed assassination ould fill Vedia with grief and would probably, after her rief abated, leave her feeling free to marry, yet, if a false eport of my death was not spread abroad, a genuine report f my actual death soon would be. It was a choice between lesser and a greater evil. I acquiesced.

I then ventured to ask him if he knew anything as to how ar the brigands had succeeded in spite of my intervention nd how far they had failed because of it. He told me that ney had effected their escape with the proprætor's coin-nests, the proprætor, and the procurator and had carried ff the widow's maid by mistake for the widow, on account f her clever device of changing clothes with her mistress. Also that Vedia had announced that she would pay a large ansom for her maid.

I then felt safe to ask what had become of Vedia, her name eing known from her advertisement. He said she had pro-ured horses and mules and had returned to Rome, sending p agents from Nuceria to negotiate with the bandits, rescue ydia and pay her ransom.

The next day, at dawn, I set off with the beast-train, rid-ng by the procurator. He and I and the *Villicus* had had talk. After the *Villicus* left my name was Festus.

I asked the procurator what had become of the bullion n account of which the brigands had routed out the cages. Ie laughed and asked whether I had noted anything pecu-ar in the handling of the cages while I was returning their ontents to them. I said I had noticed that the rollers ushed to the wagons were never used, but fresh-cut rollers ach time a cage was taken off a wagon or put back on.

He laughed again.

"You can conjecture then," he said, "why the outlaws go no grain of the dust, let alone any nugget: six hundred rollers, even with very moderate holes bored into half of them, would hold more bullion than the procurator was convoying."

I laughed also.

"I suppose," I said, "it could not be told which rollers were bored out and might crush if used."

"Just so!" said he.

We journeyed to Rome with as much hurry as could be made by such a beast-train, which was very slowly for men on good horses. We made excursions up crossroads, idled at inns, were entertained at villas and I decidedly enjoyed the beginning of my life as Festus the Beast-Tamer. We were fourteen full days on the road.

I had time to meditate on the fifth fulfillment of the prophecy of the Aemilian Sibyl. Also I had time to offer two white hens to Mercury at Nuceria, at Spolitum, at Interamnia, at Narnia and at Ocriculum.

Towards sunset just before our last night's halt out of the city, from a hilltop on the highway, I had a glorious view of Rome bathed in mellow evening sunlight, much as I had viewed it when I came down the same highroad with the mutineers from Britain. As always this unsurpassable sight filled me with intense emotions.

We entered Rome, of course, by the Flaminian Gate and at dawn. Before sunrise I was in the great mass of building variously known as the Choragium, the Therotheca, the Animal Mansions and the Beast-Barracks. These were mostly of many stories, the ground-level used for the beasts, the second floor for their keepers and attendants, the cage cleaners, the overseers, and the rest of the army of men who cared for the animals, and the upper floors utilized as store-rooms for all sorts of weapons, armor, costumes, implements and apparatus used in and for the spectacles: swords, spears, arrows, shields, helmets, breast-plates, corselets, kilts, greaves, boots, cloaks, tunics, poles, rope, pulleys, winches, jack-screws, derricks, wagons, carts, and the like.

The jumble of buildings was without any sort of general plan. Apparently a courtyard and the structures about it had been found necessary for housing the beasts and their attendants and had been bought by the management of the Colosseum. When it was overtaxed, as the number of animals exhibited increased, an adjacent property had been acquired and annexed. So the Choragium had been created and extended till it now covered many acres and had many courtyards, all arcaded on all sides. Under the arcades were set as many cages as they could accommodate; when the beasts were too numerous for their cages to be all under the arcades some were stood out in the courtyards.

I was comfortably housed in light, airy, roomy, clean and well-furnished quarters on one of the biggest courtyards. From dawn after my first night's sleep there I was busy quelling vicious beasts so their cages could be cleaned; keeping others quiet while the beast-surgeons dressed wounds inflicted by their captors or keepers or sores caused by their confinement; inducing others to swallow the remedies the animal-doctors thought good for them; leading beasts out of their cages into others; and so on.

Before I had been a full day at my duties the procurator of the Beast-Barracks complimented me, declared that I was his very ideal of just the kind of man he had always needed and wanted, averred that I was already indispensable and vowed that he could not conceive how he or the Choragium had ever gotten on without me. Within a very few days he came to my quarters and said:

"I want you to be contented here. I won't listen to a word hinting at your leaving. Otherwise I'll do all I can to gratify every wish of yours not inconsistent with your continuing here and keeping up as you have begun. Of course, within a few days now, you'll have no such rush of all-day toil as you have been having. You have been doing in the past few days all the left-over jobs which should have been attended to since warm weather began. Once you get clear of legacies from the past you'll find a day's work can

be done in much less than a day and will neither exha
nor weary you. Now what can I do to make you as co
fortable as possible?"

He had sat down and had motioned me to be seated a
I ruminated.

"In the first place," I said, "I do not want to be m
to show off in the arena before audiences. I am willing
tame animals and to keep on taming animals, but I do
want to be forced to display my powers before the popul
and the nobility, Senate and court. I have the most pow
ful antipathy to being compelled to become a performer
part of a public spectacle."

"Set your mind at rest," he said. "I give my pledge th
unless my authority is overridden, you shall not take p
in public spectacles except that you may often have to en
the arena to lead out ferocious beasts which are not to
killed or which the Emperor, or some of the courtiers, s
ators, nobles or populace have taken a fancy to for some
play of courage or craft and have ordered spared. The di
ing into a cage or out of a postern of such a beast is g
erally an irritating matter, delaying the spectacle and of
calling for the use of as many as a hundred muscular, ag
and bold attendants. I perceive that you can do alo
quickly and easily, what a large gang of eager men
often taken a long time to accomplish. Often they have
kill a recalcitrant beast. I feel that I need you for t
and I trust that you are willing."

"Entirely," I answered.

"Good!" said he, and resumed:

"Now, what is your next point?"

"In the second place," I said, "I do not want to be peste
with visitors; nobles or wealthy idlers who take a fancy
me and think they are conferring a favor on me by intrud
on me and wasting my time with their inquisitive questi
and patronizing remarks. In particular I have a horror
the kind of women who have a fad for molesting with th
attentions singers, actors, gladiators, beast-fighters, char
eers and so on; if one of them gets after me and the in

n spreads to more I shall find life here in Rome altogether endurable.

"I speak feelingly (I thought it proper to lie like a Greek, necessary, in a situation like mine). Where I was before suffered from the attentions of enthusiastic admirers and have had all I want of it and far more; enough to last f a dozen lifetimes."

"Festus," said the procurator, "where were you before?"

"If you had seen my back," I said, "you wouldn't expect to tell you."

"I don't expect you to tell me," he laughed, "but I could help asking; you are such a wonder that I am tormented h the desire to know all about you, not merely where you ne from and how you got into the *ergastulum* at Nuceria. t I shall not press you for any information about your-. Keep your own secrets as long as you are willing to rk miracles for me.

"I don't want to see your back; without seeing it I may that if anyone ill-treated you he was an amazing fool. u shall not be flogged here, nor ill-used in any way. I'll e all the measures in my power to ensure that no visitors her you and that you are protected not only from genuine rting nobles but still more from the silly loungers who nk it adds to their importance to make the acquaintance ll persons of public reputation. Especially I'll have you rded from intrusive fine ladies."

"What next?"

"I want plenty of the best fruit," I said boldly.

"You'll get all you can eat of whatever the markets afford," said, "and understand right here that I'll indulge you to extent in anything relating to your food or wine, as g as you keep sober. Similarly you can have anything ask for in the way of extra clothing or bedding or fur-hings for your quarters. If you don't like the slave ailed to wait on you I'll have another put in his place keep on changing till you get one to suit you.

"You are to be indulged and pampered in every way in power, except that I mean to keep you hard at work,

long hours each day, at the cages, whenever it is necessary

I thanked him and agreed to do my best to please him.

Not many days later, as he had foretold, my work becan less continuous and less burdensome. Soon afterwards settled into a sort of daily routine which occupied me, b did not wear me out and which often left me not a litt free time.

I found that I was entirely free to go and come as pleased, when not occupied. I did go to the Temple Mercury and offer two white hens bought in the Foru Boarium, as I had done when in the City with Maternu Otherwise I kept pretty close for more than a month. feared to be recognized as myself by some secret-servi agent; I feared almost as much to be identified as Fel the Horse-Tamer by some henchman of the King of t Highwaymen. I wanted to try to communicate with Vedi but the more I pondered on how to do so the more I s only betrayal, recognition and death as the probable resu of every plan I devised.

CHAPTER XXX

FESTUS

DOMICILED in the Choragium and busy there and the Colosseum I spent almost a year. Until the a proach of winter put a stop to spectacles in the arena a after the outset of spring permitted their resumption, I w not only continuously busy, but entirely contented. Of t dreary and tedious winter between, which was intensely d piriting and appeared interminable, the less I say the bett I do not want to remind myself of it.

I was of course free from the bodily miseries which h made my winters at Placentia and Nuceria so terrible: I d not suffer from cold, hunger, vermin, sleeplessness, overwo exhaustion, weakness, blows and abuse. I was, on the co

trary, comfortably lodged and clothed, well attended, lavishly and excellently fed and humored by the procurator.

But at Placentia and Nuceria I had solaced myself amid the horror of my situation by reminding myself that I was, at least, alive, and, as long as I was in an *ergastulum,* entirely safe from any danger of being recognized and executed. Here, in Rome, often in the arena, under the eyes of sixty thousand Romans, thousands of whom had known me in my prosperity and hundreds of whom had known me familiarly from my childhood, I was, every instant, in peril of recognition and of betrayal to the secret service. While I was actually in the arena I was so busy or so exhilarated by my participation in the most magnificent spectacle on earth that I never worried a moment. I seldom worried while I was occupied with any of my duties in the Colosseum or Choragium, although I knew I was very liable to recognition, for the passages and vaults of the Colosseum and the courtyards of the Choragium were habitually visited by men of sporting tastes; gentlemen, wealthy idlers, noblemen, senators, courtiers, even the Emperor himself. I was, in my intellect, conscious of my danger; but, while I was occupied, it did not perturb my feelings.

During the idleness of the long winter my peril did rob me of sleep, of appetite and of peace of mind. I had continually to devise excuses for remaining in my lodgings, for declining invitations to banquets, for keeping to myself. I dreaded that the procurator himself was growing suspicious of me. He had, in the kindness of his heart, thrown in my way offers of opportunities for outings, for diversions, for entertainments, which any man in my situation might have been expected to accept with alacrity. My refusals, I felt, might set him to thinking. He was entirely loyal to the Emperor and the government. If the idea ever crossed his mind he would, at once, have reported to the secret service that it would be well to take a look at Festus the Beast-Tamer; he might be other than he appeared. The anxiety caused by these thoughts preyed upon my mind.

Without reason, apparently. The procurator, as I look back on that deadly winter, seems to have accepted all my

peculiarities without question. If I would remain conte
and quell obstreperous beasts when spring opened as I ha
until autumn ushered in winter, I might do and be anythi
I pleased. If I pleased to mope in my quarters, pace und
the arcades of the courtyard, lie abed from early dusk t
after sunrise, what mattered that to him? Such, apparentl
was his attitude of mind. He gave orders that I was to ha
my meals alone in my quarters, as I requested. He ha
brought to me, from the libraries of the Basilica Ulpia, mo
of the books I asked for. I had read all the books on catc
ing, caring for, curing, managing, taming and fighting beas
which formed the library of the Choragium. After they we
exhausted I asked the procurator for more. As he had
cousin among the assistant curators at the Ulpian Libra
he was able to gratify me. After I could learn of no mo
books on beasts I took to comedies and read Nævius, all
Menander and Cæcilius, and most of the best plays of oth
writers of comedies; then I turned to histories, which
thought safe, and spent my days for the remainder of t
winter sleeping early, long and late, eating abundant mea
of good food, walking miles round and round the big cou
yard under the empty arcades, exercising in the gymnasium
the Choragium, steaming and parboiling and half-roastin
myself in its small but very well-appointed and well-serve
baths, and, otherwise, reading every bit of my daylight.
kept well and I remained safe, ignored and unnoticed. T
procurator kept his word as to shielding me from visito
and he said he had much ado to succeed, for the ease a
certitude with which, in the open arena, before all Rome,
approached a lion or tiger which had just slaughtered
criminal and lapped his blood, seized the beast by the ma
or scruff of the neck, as if he had been a tame dog, and l
him to a postern or into his cage, roused much interest, mu
curiosity, many enquiries and not a little desire to see n
closer, question me, talk with me, get acquainted with n
and learn the secret of my power.

I thanked the porcurator for his resolution and succe
in rebuffing would-be patrons eager to pamper me. Als

winter, I dreaded that he would be less lucky or less amantine when spring came.

Thus passed my fourth winter since my disaster. I might have been spared much of my anxiety during e winter if I had learned sooner that such aloofness as ne was no novelty to the procurator, that he had, among s most valued subordinates, a man even more unsociable an I, and even more highly esteemed and more sedulously mpered. This was the celebrated and regretted Spaniard, ercablis, who, for more than thirty years, was accorded the Choragium a home of his own, a retinue of servants d the fulfillment of every whim, of which the chief was his termination to have as little as possible to do with any man being except his wife and their three children, for was not a slave, but a freeman. In his way Mercablis was celebrated as Felix Bulla the brigand or Agyllius Septen-o the actor of mimes, and the memory of his fame yet gers in the recollections of the aged and in the talk of eir children and grandchildren. For it was Mercablis o, for half a life-time, invented, rehearsed, and kept secret l the moment of its display the noon-hour sensational sur-ise for each day of games in the Colosseum.

I have, in my later years, met many persons who con-atulated me on my luck in having personally known and equently talked with Mercablis, just as many have similarly vied me my encounters with Felix Bulla. For myself I ve never plumed myself on such features of my adventures, ough they are not unpleasing to recall.

When, in the spring of the next year, while Fuscianus and lanus were consuls, I came to know Mercablis and to con-ler him, I arrived at the conclusion that his inclination r solitude and his aloofness were not the result of any ead of strangers or of any need for seclusion, like mine, t the product of a disposition naturally churlish, crabbed d unsocial.

Habituated as the procurator had been to Mercablis and s loathing for strangers, my desire for privacy had seemed him as a matter of course.

Resolute as Mercablis was to be let alone, he was enormously vain and self-conceited and puffed up with his conviction of his own importance. He never smiled, but some subtle alteration in his countenance betrayed that any flattery pleased him.

He was a tall, spare, bony man, with a dry, brown, leathery skin, lean legs and arms, a stringy neck, almost no chin, a hooked nose, deep set little greeny-gray eyes and intensely black, harsh, stiff, curly hair and very bushy eyebrows. He wore old, worn, faded garments and stalked about as if the fate of the universe depended on him.

Certainly he never failed to surprise all Rome when the time came for his novelty to be displayed. Every one which I saw, either earlier when I was myself or while in the Choragium as Festus the Beast-Wizard or later, justified the claim of Mercablis to being the most original-minded sensation-deviser ever known in the Colosseum or elsewhere.

One of his utterly unpredictable surprises recurs often to my recollection.

It was a hot July day and, during the noon pause, the vendors of cooling drinks did a good business among the spectators of the upper tiers. To the ring-rope round the opening in the awning, over the middle of the arena, had been fastened a big, strong, pulley block. One of the lightest and most agile of the awning-boys hung by his hands from the radial rope stretched from nearest that pulley, worked out to it, sat on it, rove through it a light cord which he carried coiled at his waist, and worked back along the radial rope, leaving the cord trailing from the pulley-wheel to the sand of the arena. By means of the cord the arena-slaves rove through the pulley first a light rope, then a very strong one.

The end of this rope they fastened to an iron ring, from which hung four stout chains, three of them of equal length, each about thirty feet, whose lower ends, at points precisely equidistant from each other, were fastened to a big iron hoop all of twenty-four feet across. From the hoop hung six lighter chains, like the fourth chain which hung from the ring. As the six were fastened to the hoop either where one

of the upper chains ended or exactly between two of them each of the six was precisely twelve feet from those on either side of it and from the center chain hanging from the ring. The hoop hung perfectly level and each of the seven chains, about thirty feet below the level of the hoop, had hung to it an iron disk, a yard or more across, hanging by a ring-bolt in its center and perfectly level. From a second ring-bolt in the underside of each disk depended more of the same light, strong chain, to a length of some thirty feet below the disks.

I, like all the arena-slaves and Choragium-slaves, like all the spectators, knew that this apparatus portended some unpredictable surprise; but I, like the others, like the audience, gaped at it, incredulous and unable to conjecture what it could be for.

Then arena-slaves carried in and set down on the sand a full hundred feet from the hoop and chains, a dozen or more wicker crates full of quacking white ducks with yellow bills. They and the noise they made recalled unpleasantly to me my sensations as I clung to the alder bush immersed in Bran Brook, after Agathemer and I had crawled through the drain at Villa Andivia.

Then there was a delay and I was called out to assist the *mahout* of the Choragium's best trick elephant, the smallest full-grown elephant I ever saw and the worst-dispositioned elephant of any age or size which ever I encountered. When I and the *mahout* had put him in a good humor he entered the arena and stationed himself by the crates of quacking ducks.

Then there marched out into the arena a procession of arena-slaves, four by four, each four carrying by two poles a strong cage housing a big African ape. These cages they set down each under one of the chains depending from the hoop. Then I was called to deal with the baboons.

Now I fear no beast, but of all beasts I most dislike an African ape. These creatures, inhabiting the mountains of Mauretania, Gætulia and the Province of Africa, are big as a big dog and have teeth as long and cruel as any big dog. They are violent and treacherous. Whereas any wild bear or wolf I ever approached would permit me to handle him

without snarling or growling, every baboon I ever had handle made some sort of threatening noise inside hi Although none ever bit me or attempted any attack on m yet the hideousness of such apes and their vile odor alwa made me timid in dealing with them.

Each of these seven had around his middle an iron hoo belt, with a strong ring-bolt in the back. It was my ta to affix the end of each pendant chain to the ring-bolt in t belt of one of the baboons. This was easy to do, as ea cage, in addition to a door in one side, had a trap-door in i top; and each chain had a snap-hook ringed to its last lin More difficult was managing so that the apes should be haul up out of their cages without any two swinging sidewa enough to clutch each other; for, while baboons in their nati haunts hunt in packs, male baboons not of the same pa always fight venomously and members of the same pack, separated for a time, are as hostile to each other as males different packs.

By care and caution, the slaves at the rope obeying m signals promptly, I at last had all seven apes clear of the cages, and not swinging too much. Then the cages we removed and the hoop lowered somewhat. Then I steadi each chain till none had any side-ways swing. Each a finally hung on a level with every other ape, and about tw yards above the sand of the arena.

I say finally, for it was at once manifest why the disks we hung to the chains; each baboon swarmed up his chain; ea got no higher than the disk, for it was too broad for h arm to reach the chain above it, so that each failed to clin past it, and, after some chattering, and hesitation, ea climbed down his chain again and hung by his belt, eve one mowing and chattering at his neighbors, frantic wi hostility and eager for a fight.

When all seven were quiet the herald proclaimed th wagers might now be laid on the apes, the survivor of t seven to be the winner. Each had a different color paint on his iron ring: blue, green, red, yellow and so on. T spectators appeared to make bets.

Then when the arena was clear between the elephant and the baboons and beyond them, the *mahout* spoke to his charge, the elephant inserted his trunk through the opened lid of a crate of ducks, grasped a duck by the neck, lifted it out, swung it, and hurled it at the hanging apes. It hurtled through the air, flapping its wings in vain, and passed between the baboons, they grabbing for it as it shot by, it falling far beyond them on the sand.

A roar of appreciative yells rose from the spectators.

The elephant threw another duck and another. The third came within reach of one ape. He seized it and bit it savagely, tearing it to pieces with vicious glee. Its impact set him swinging.

Duck after duck was hurled till another baboon caught and rent another. This went on till two of the swinging apes came within grasping distance of each other. At once they grappled, bit each other and fought till one was killed.

It made a queer spectacle; the crates of quacking ducks, the thin-legged, blackskinned, turbaned *mahout,* the wickedly comprehending little elephant, the chattering baboons, the ducks hurtling through the air, and running about the sand all over the arena, for many of them fell and escaped alive, the yelling spectators of the upper tiers, the mildly amused parties in the Imperial and senatorial boxes, the blaze of sun over everything.

The duck-throwing was continued till only one ape remained alive.

It was all very exciting and so whimsically odd that it was acclaimed a most successful surprise. It is yet remembered by those who saw it or heard of it from them as the most spectacular and peculiar of all the inventions of the lamented Mercablis.

Of my experiences while in the Choragium and about the amphitheater the most notable were my opportunities for observing Commodus as a beast-fighter, the passion for the sport which possessed him, his absorption in it, even rage for it, his unflagging interest in it, his untiring pursuit of it, and his amazing strength and astounding skill in the use

of arrows, spears, swords, and even clubs as weapons fo killing beasts.

Keen as was his enjoyment of his own dexterity and fon as he was of displaying it to admiring and applauding on lookers, infatuated as he was with the intoxication of butch ery, proficiency and adulation, he retained sufficient vestige of decency and self-respect to restrain him from exhibitin himself as a beast-fighter in public spectacles before all Rome Of late years I have heard not a few persons declare an maintain that they had seen and recognized him in the aren during the mornings of public festivals; that his outline, atti tudes, movements and his manner of handling a sword, club, a spear or a bow were unmistakable. I asseverate tha these persons were and are self-deceived, or talking idly o repeating what they have heard from others or merely lying Commodus never so far debased himself as to take his stan in the arena of the Colosseum on the morning of a publi spectacle with all Rome looking on; still less did he eve disgrace himself by actually killing beasts in full sight o the whole populace. I speak from full knowledge. I know

I may remark here that, taking the other extreme fro these detractors or gossips, there exist persons who maintai that Commodus never drove a chariot in public, let alone as competing jockey in a succession of races in the Circus Max imus on a regular festival day in full view of all Rome; like wise that he not only never, as a gladiator, killed an adversar in public combat, but never so much as shed blood in any o his fights; asserting that he merely practised with lath foil inside the Palace.

These latter persons are of the class who are horrified tha a Prince of the Republic should have debased himself a did Commodus, who feel that it is discreditable to Imperia Majesty in general that such shameful occurrences took pla and who are foolish enough to fancy that harm done may b undone by forgetting what happened, by whispering about i by keeping silent, by hushing up as much as possible a reports of it, by expunging all mention of it from the publi records, by garbling histories and annals so as to make

ppear that Commodus merely longed to do and practiced or ayed at doing what he actually did.

These wiseacres are as far from the truth as his libellers id slanderers.

If anything in addition to my solemn assertion is needful convince any reader of this chronicle that I am right, let e remind him that all Rome knew or knew of Palus the ladiator, afterwards of Palus the Charioteer, later yet gain of Palus the Gladiator; of Palus, the unsurpassable, e inimitable, the incomparable: incomparable in his ease, s grace, his litheness, his agility, his quickness, his amazing pacity for seeing the one right thing to do, the one thing hich no other man could have thought of, and for doing it ithout a sign of perturbation, haste or effort, yet swift as ghtning, with the effectiveness of Jove's thunderbolts and ith the joyousness of a happy lad; always the same Palus id always in every dimension, attitude and movement the cture, the image, the double of Commodus: whereas no one er heard or saw Palus the Beast-Fighter.

I think the chief reason why Commodus could not resist e temptation to degrade himself to the level of a public aracter and a public gladiator, yet, despite his infatuation r beast-killing, shrank from dishonoring himself by ap-aring at a public festival as a beast-fighter, was that beast-ghters are not merely more despised than charioteers or adiators but the contempt felt for them has in it quite a fferent quality from that felt for gladiators and charioteers. verybody sees criminals killed by beasts and there are all rts of variations in the manner in which criminals are ex-osed to death by wild animals. Some are turned naked and eaponless into the arena to be mangled by lions or bears other huge beasts: others are left clad in their tunics; me of these are allowed the semblance of a weapon; a club, nife, dagger or light javelin; so that their appearance of aving some chance may make their destruction more divert-g to the spectators: others, in order to prolong their agonies, e furnished with real weapons, as a sword, a pike, a trident, en a hunting spear with a full-sized triangular head, its

edges honed sharp as razors; others are left completely clad with or without sham weapons or actual arms, yet others ar protected by armor, corselets, kilts, greaves, or even hip boots and helmets, and wear swords and carry shields as wel as pikes or spears: these last differ in appearance in no respec from professional beast-fighters.

This produces, in the minds of persons of all classes sort of confusion between beast-fighters and criminals an brings it about that there attaches to those persons of noble birth or free-birth who, whether from hope of gain, fron poverty, or from infatuation with the sport or from mer bravado, abase themselves as beast-fighters, an obloquy fa intenser than that which attaches to freemen or nobles wh dishonor themselves by becoming gladiators or charioteers Such self-abasements have been known ever since the reig of Nero, began to become more common under Domitian an have ceased to be regarded as anything unusual; in fact, s many men of good birth or even of high birth have becom gladiators or charioteers, so many of these have acquire popularity, so many, even if actually few, have won wealt and fame, that professional charioteering or swordsmanshi has almost ceased to be regarded as a degradation. Not s beast-fighting. No one can point to a record of any free man or noble having appeared in the arena as a beast-fighte and afterwards having regained by any acquisition whether o reputation or fortune the position in society which he ha forfeited by his dishonor.

At any rate, Commodus gratified his enthusiasm fo beast-killing in two entirely different ways. One was b regaling the people with spectacles of unheard-of, even o incredible magnificence, at which not only the noon-hour wa filled with ingenious and novel feats of trick-riding, tight rope-walking, jugglery, acrobatics and the like, and one o the surprises invented by Mercablis and the afternoons en nobled by hosts of gladiators, paired or fighting by four sixes or tens, twenties or in battalions, as if soldiers in actua battles; but the mornings were exciting with the slaughter o hordes of animals of all kinds; with fights of ferocious beast

ıd with the fighting and killing of fierce animals by the ıost expert and venturesome beast-fighters. At these spec-ıcles Commodus participated as a spectator, in the Imperial avilion, surrounded by his officials and the great officers of is household, clad in his princely robes, seated on his gold-ıounted ivory throne.

His other method of gratifying his infatuation was by ımself killing all sorts of beasts, either from the coping the arena, or from platforms constructed out on the ena or from the level of the sand itself, for which feats he ad as spectators the whole Senate and the entire body of ır nobility, summoned by special invitation and most of ıem by no means reluctant to enjoy the spectacle of the ıperlative prowess possessed by their Prince.

When any of the Vestals were present at these eccentric thibitions they occupied their front-row box and Marcia sually sat with them, generally accompanied by as many of er intimates among the wives of senators as the box would ccommodate. The Vestals, as the only human beings in ome who did not fear Commodus, were often entirely in-ependent in their behavior and refused his invitations; but ıey did it politely, alleging that the regulations of their cult rbade any Vestal absenting herself from the Temple and trium on that particular day. When no Vestal was present Iarcia occupied their box, by their invitation, and filled it ith her noblest and wealthiest favorites among the senatorial ıatrons, often wives of ex-consuls.

On these occasions Commodus wore fulldress boots of a ıape precisely as with his official robes but not of the usual olor: they had indeed the Imperial eagles embroidered on ıem in gold thread, but, instead of being of sky-blue dull-nished leather, they were of a shiny, glaze-surfaced leather white as milk, their soles gilded along the edges. Gold mbroidery set off his tunic, which was of the purest white lk, shimmering brilliantly. He always wore many gold ings, set with rubies and emeralds; also an elaborate neck-ıce matching his rings. His bright, soft, curly, yellow hair aloed his face as did his almost as bright and fully as yellow

and curly beard. His eyes were very bright blue, his cheek very red. He was very handsome. The expression of vacuou miscomprehension like that on the face of a country bumpkin which was so usual with Commodus when dealing with of ficial business or social duties, never appeared on his counte nance when revelling in his favorite sport: then his expressio was intelligent, lively and even charming.

He was at this time in his twenty-sixth year and in th very prime of his life. Before his death, instead of the rosi ness of health on his face and the glow of youth on his cheeks, his entire countenance was unbecomingly flushed an florid, like that of a drunkard.

His weapons were as exquisitely designed and finished a his costume. When he used a club it was of the wood o some Egyptian palm or of cornel-wood, heavily gilded; heap of such clubs was always in readiness when he entere the arena. Similarly there was ready for him an arsena of swords, of every style, shape and size, from short Osca swords not much longer than daggers to Gallic swords wit blades a full yard long and thin as kitchen spits. All wer gold-hilted, sheathed in colored, tooled, embroidered, gilde or even bejewelled leather; many had their blades gilde except the edges and points. There was piled up ready fo his choice a mountain of spears, of patterns as various a the swords. All had their shafts whitened with some nove sort of paint which produced a gleaming effect like the shee of the white portions of the finer sorts of decorated Gree vases. This glaze effect was over all of each shaft except a the grip, where the natural wood always appeared, roughene like the surface of a file with criss-cross lines to afford him surer grasp. His bows were all gilded, his quivers gilded o of gem-studded, brightly tinted leather, in many colored pat terns; his arrows gilded all over, points, shafts and feathers or with feathers dyed red, blue, green or violet. Every deta of his get-up and equipment was to the last degree perfect reliable, beautiful, unusual and costly.

I pondered a great deal over his infatuation and its conse quences.

In the first place, as when contemplating the torrent of beast-wagons flowing down the Flaminian Highroad, I was, being still inwardly a Roman noble, overwhelmed with shame that the enormous, but even so insufficient, revenues of the Republic should be diverted from their proper uses for the maintenance of our prosperity and the defence of the frontiers of the Empire and squandered on the silly amusements of a great, hulking, empty-headed lad.

Then I was almost equally ashamed that a man who could, on occasion, if sufficiently roused, be, for a space, as completely Prince and Emperor as Commodus had repeatedly shown himself in my sight, could, on the other hand, waste his time and energies on displaying his dexterity in feats of archery, javelin-throwing, swordsmanship, agility and mere strength. It appeared to me not only shameful but incredible that a man who was capable of such complete adequacy in his proper station in life as Commodus had shown himself to be, for instance, when berating Satronius and Vedius or, still more, when facing the mutineers and dooming Perennis, should be willing to leave the management of the Republic and the ruling of the Empire to an ex-slave and ex-street porter like Cleander, and occupy his time with spearing bears, shooting with arrows lions, tigers, or elephants and what not, burying his sword-blade in bulls, even with clubbing ostriches.

I oscillated or vacillated between these two lines of thought. The sight of Commodus dodging the lightning rush of an infuriated ostrich and neatly despatching him with a single blow on the head from a palm-wood club no longer and no thicker than his own forearm not only stirred my wonder that any man could possess such accuracy of eyesight, such power of judging distances and time, such perfect coördination of his faculties of observation, of his will and of his muscles; but also roused my disgust that a man capable of ruling the world and with the opportunity to show his capabilities should degrade himself to wasting time on tricks of agility and feats of strength and skill.

On the other hand the sight of Commodus using a full-

grown male Indian elephant as a target for his arrows en raged me. Next to a man an Indian elephant is the most intelligent creature existing on this earth of ours, as far as we know. An elephant lives far longer than a man. His life of useful labor is longer than the total life of a long-lived man. And his labor can be very useful to mankind. An elephant can travel, day after day, as fast and far as a horse he can accomplish easily tasks to which no team of horses, not even of sixteen horses, is adequate, he can outdo any gang of men at loading or unloading a ship with massive timbers or with many other kinds of cargo in heavy and bulky units. It can only be a shame to kill, for mere sport, so noble a creature. It is bad enough to exhibit in the arena fights of elephants, which kill each other for our diversion, when we might utilize their courage and prowess in battle, as the Indians do. But to use an elephant as a mere target for arrows is far worse.

Then again, while I watched Commodus killing an elephant with his arrows I could not but think of the hundreds of men who had been employed in tracking his herd, building a stockade, driving into it what elephants they could, fettering them, taming them, caring for this one after he had been tamed, tending him on his journey of many thousand miles from India, across Gadrosia, Carmania, Susiana, Mesopotamia and Syria to Antioch and from there to Rome; on getting food for him on his journey and at different cities; on the vast expense of all this; and for what? That a silly and vainglorious overgrown child should shoot him full of arrows till he bled to death!

I raged inwardly.

I quite agree that Commodus enjoyed killing for killing's sake; it gave him a sort of sense of triumph to behold any animal succumb to his weapons. But I think his sense of triumph was also far more for his repeated self-congratulation on his accuracy of aim for shot or blow, on the perfection of his really amazing dexterity.

When he shot at elephants the procedure was always the same; two elephants were turned into the arena, and Com-

modus was matched against some archer of superlative reputation, whose prowess had been repeatedly demonstrated before the audiences of the Colosseum, a Parthian, Scythian, or Mauretanian. A prize was offered to him if he won and wagers were laid, mostly of ten to one or more on Commodus; he, of course, betting on himself with at least one senator at any odds his taker chose. Then the contest began, Commodus shooting from the Imperial Pavilion, his competitor from any part of the *podium* which he might choose, so that both archers were on an equality, being placed on the coping of the arena at spots they had chosen. The prize went to whichever killed his elephant with the fewest arrows. Commodus always won. Not that his competitors did not do their best. They did. But he was, in fact, the best archer alive. His accuracy of aim was uncanny and his strength really terrific. He could himself string a hundred and sixty pound bow and he shot a bow even stiffer than that without apparent effort and with fascinating and indescribable grace. He never missed, not only not the animal, but not even the vital part aimed at. I was told that, when he first practiced on an elephant, he killed it with arrows in the liver, of which eleven were required to finish the beast. He then had it cut open under Galen's supervision, he watching. He thereafter never failed to reach an elephant's heart with his third arrow, killed most with his second, and not a few with his first, a feat never equaled or approached by any other archer, for the killing of an elephant with five arrows by Tilla the Goth remains the best record ever made in the Colosseum by any other bowman. The impact of his arrows was so weighty that I have beheld one go entirely through the paunch of a full-grown male elephant and protrude a foot on the other side.

With rhinoceroses and hippopotami the procedure was similar. Neither of these animals could be had as plentifully as elephants, of which I saw Commodus and his competitors kill more than thirty; mostly Mauretanian elephants, but some Indian and a few Nubian. I saw killed for his amusements in similar contests in which he participated

four rhinoceroses and six hippopotami. In these matches he killed one rhinoceros with two arrows and the rest with one; so of the hippopotami. As with the elephants, after he had seen a rhinoceros and a hippopotamus cut open under Galen's direction, he retained so vivid an impression of the location of its heart that, from any direction, whether the beast was moving or still, he sent his arrow so as to reach the heart. This sounds incredible, but it is exactly the truth.

As I watched I kept imagining the baking deserts of Libya or the steaming swamps of Nubia, the shouting hordes of negroes, the many killed by the beast, its capture, and the infinite and expensive care necessary to bring one alive to Rome.

Besides these enormous animals he practiced archery on the huge long-horned bulls from the forests of Dacia and Germany; on the bisons from the same regions, beasts with heavy shoulders, low rumps and small horns, parallel to each other, curving downwards over the brows; on the big stags from these far-off forests, or any sort of stags! And on two varieties of African antelope not much inferior in size to stags or bulls. He very seldom needed a third arrow to put an end to any beast of these kinds, not often a second arrow, and, actually, killed hundreds, even thousands, neatly and infallibly with his first shot. All these animals he shot from the *podium,* often leaning on the coping, his right knee on it, generally standing, his feet wide apart, the toes of his right foot against the coping wall; for, as with sword or spear or club, he also shot left-handed.

From the arena itself, standing on the sand on which they scampered about, he shot multitudes of smaller animals: wild ponies, wild asses, striped African zebras, gazelles, and at least a dozen varieties of small African antelopes, for which there are no special names in Latin or even in Greek. The antelopes and gazelles, although they ran quicker than hares, he never missed and seldom did he fail to kill with one arrow whatever animal he aimed at. He never, to my knowledge, missed even the incredibly speedy wild asses.

Nor did he ever miss an ostrich, though he shot both from

he *podium* and the sand these birds, which are swifter than ven the wild asses. He shot at them with arrows made pecially after a pattern of his own, with crescent-shaped eads set on the shaft with the two horns of the crescent ointing forward, the inner curve sharpened to a razor edge. hooting at an ostrich racing at top speed he never failed decapitate it with one shot, invariably severing its neck out a hands-breadth below its head.

He also killed with javelins or arrows wolves, hyenas, ears, lynxes, leopards, panthers, tigers and lions. But when illing such dangerous and ferocious animals he took his and on a platform, the floor of which was about three yards quare and elevated about that distance above the sand, con-ructed well out in the arena so that he could shoot down any direction on beasts rushing towards or past the plat-orm or driven past it or towards it. He slaughtered in-redible multitudes of these creatures and certainly dis-layed amazing strength and skill, habitually killing a lion ith one javelin, almost as often with one arrow, and the ke for tigers; and oftener for panthers and leopards. He ever needed a second arrow to finish a wolf or hyena or even lynx. The marvellous accuracy of his aim, the way he lanted his arrow unerringly in the heart of a galloping olf scudding across the sand far from him; the way he rove a broad-bladed hunting-spear clear through a huge haggy bear, never failed to rouse my wonder, even my ad-iration.*

CHAPTER XXXI

RECOGNITION

I DO not recall any special feat of the Imperial beast-killer during the summer and autumn of the year in hich I had fooled Bulla and been transferred from the tud-farm to the Choragium, which was the year in which Crispinus and Aelian were consuls, the nine hundred and

* See Note J.

fortieth year of the City,* and the eighth of the Principat of Commodus. But, when the season for spectacles in th arena opened with the first warm, fair weather of the fol lowing spring, he returned to his favorite sport with re doubled zest, amounting to a craze.

It was during the spring and early summer of this yea that he began to make huge wagers with wealthy senators betting that he could kill a specified number of a specifie variety of animal with a specified number of spears or ar rows; always proposing so to limit himself as to numbe of weapons that the exploit appeared impossible. The re sult was that avaricious Midases were eager to wager, a they felt certain of winning. Yet he never lost, not once.

And, after each wager made, or won, he made the nex on a narrower margin at smaller odds, until he struck th whole nobility numb by offering to wager even money tha he could kill one hundred full-grown male bears from hi usual platform with one hundred hunting spears, covenanting that he was to lose if he needed one hundred and one spear casts to lay out those hundred bears limp, flabby and utterly dead. This appeared so utterly an impossibility that Aufid ius Fronto offered to put up two million sesterces agains him. The pompous sham philosopher, who feigned the pro foundest contempt for riches, could not resist what looke like enormous gains. He made the wager, and Commodu won.

Now I cannot insist too positively on the amazing, th incredible strength and skill and nerve required for thi fatiguing and taxing feat. Any other man I ever knew o heard of would have shown evidences of weariness long be fore he had despatched his hundredth bear; would certainly have betrayed the terrific strain on his nerves. Commodu was, apparently, as fresh, as jaunty, as full of reserv strength, as far from being unsure of himself when he fin ished the hundredth bear as when he drove his first spear int the first.

* 187 A.D.

Now it requires altogether exceptional strength so to cast even the best design of hunting-spear, as keen as possible, as to drive it through the matted pelt, thick hide and big bones of a bear; in so driving it, to aim it so that it will pierce his heart calls for superhuman skill. And to reiterate this feat ninety-nine times in succession argues a perfection of eye, hand and nerve never possessed by any man save Commodus. Any other man would have felt the strain, most men would have become so anxious towards the end as to become agitated. He kept calm and cool.

I thoroughly enjoyed the discomfiture of Aufidius Fronto and relished his futile efforts to appear indifferent to his money loss.

Not many days later Commodus made a similar and still more hazardous wager with Didius Julianus, the most opulent and ostentatious of the senators, who was afterwards nominally Emperor for two months and five days. This wager covenanted that Commodus, from his platform in the arena, would despatch one hundred full-grown male lions, in their prime and vigorous, with one hundred javelins. On this arduous frivolity they wagered ten million sesterces and had the actual gold, fifty thousand big, broad, gold pieces, carried into the arena and piled up in a gleaming mound on a monster crimson rug for all to behold. This bit of ostentation was like Didius Julianus and not unnatural for Commodus.

I have never seen any man perform so easily so difficult a feat. Killing a lion with three javelins requires very unusual strength and skill. To kill ten lions with forty casts would tax the muscles, dexterity and nerves of the best spearman the world ever knew. To kill a hundred lions with barely one javelin apiece was bravado to propose and miraculous to accomplish. Accomplish it he did and without any visible effort or strain. Eighty-nine of the hundred he shot through the heart; the remaining eleven with difficult fancy shots which he was, against all reason, tempted to

essay, and which, against all probability, uniformly were fully successful.

Didius Julianus paid his wager without any show of chagrin, as he could well afford to do.

At once Commodus offered to bet that he could kill a hundred similar lions with a bare hundred arrows. Didius at once wagered the same sum he had just lost and the bet was made. The exhibition was delayed more than a month until it had been possible to accumulate at Rome a full hundred full-grown male lions. Then Commodus again shot in sight of a pile of gold pieces on an expanse of crimson velvet spread on the sand of the arena.

Commodus won as before, with exactly the same number of heart shots and fancy shots. If one miracle can be greater than another this feat surpassed its predecessor. For a lion takes a great deal of killing before he dies, and each of these hundred lions died as quickly as any lion ever does. Instant killing of a lion with a javelin is a miracle, even more miraculous is instant killing of a lion with one arrow. Commodus so killed the full hundred.

I know of no more astounding demonstration of his infallible and tremendous muscle power than the fact that, shooting at a lion fully twenty yards away, and in the act of rearing rampantly at the beginning of a bound, he sent his arrow into the roof of its mouth, through the brain, the entire length of the spinal cord and so far that its point protruded from the dead beast's rump above the root of its tail. Galen, who, as often, was in the amphitheater in case of injury to the Prince, and who was in the habit of dissecting such dead beasts as interested him, cut along the path followed by the missile, cleaving the dead lion in two lengthwise and laying the two halves hide downward on the sand, so as to demonstrate to a bevy of curious and awed spectators the incredible path of that arrow.

Commodus lived on miracles. Of all the thousands of darts, javelins and spears which I saw him throw, of all the countless arrows I saw him shoot, not one ever missed its mark, not one merely hit the beast aimed at, everyone,

even if launched at an ostrich skimming the sand or a gazelle, struck deep and true precisely where he had aimed it.

As I am about to narrate the occurrence which put an end to the insensate indulgence in beast-killing in which Commodus had revelled, I am reminded that, besides his vilifiers, who assert that he publicly exhibited himself as an ordinary beast-fighter, and his apologists, who maintain that he not only did not do so, but never so much as drove a chariot in public or spilt human blood with an edged weapon, there are others who, while not retailing or inventing any fictions or attempting to blink or suppress any facts, yet inveigh against Commodus as absurdly assuming the attributes of Hercules while really a weakling and as pretending to powers which he never possessed, as having been largely or wholly a counterfeit spearman, a make-believe archer, a sham swordsman and a mock athlete.

Among other alleged proofs of these baseless contentions they cite the ecstatic joy with which, to the limit of the supply gathered from all parts of the African deserts, he day after day, on the sands of the arena, delightedly clubbed ostriches, alleging that killing an ostrich with a sword or club is child's play and no feat of skill. As to this particular citation of vaunted evidence, as in their contentions at large, they are egregiously mistaken and far from the facts and the truth.

Actually, for a lone man, on level ground, far from any shelter, an angry full-grown young male ostrich is a formidable assailant and a dangerous antagonist. No living creature that roves the surface of our earth moves faster than a healthy ostrich. When running it skims the arena, when attacking it darts. It kicks forward, raising its long and powerful leg high in the air and bringing it down with a blow so swift that the eye cannot follow it and so forcible that I have seen one such stroke smash all together the collar-bone, shoulder-blade, upper arm-bone and half the ribs on that side of its unfortunate victim, a big, agile, vigorous Nubian, habituated to ostriches in their haunts. And, if the leg misses its mark, as it very seldom does, the bird, as it

hurls past its enemy, pecks viciously at his face, its sturdy beak being capable of inflicting a serious wound wherever it strikes, and often destroying an eye, its usual target.

To stand alone, far out in the arena, bare-headed, clad only in a diaphanous silken tunic, armed only with a club no longer or thicker than his forearm; so habited and armed to await the assault of an infuriated bird so bulky, so swift, so agile and so powerful; to dodge jauntily, but infallibly, both the stroke of the leg and the stab of the beak, and invariably to bring his club down on the darting head and finish the bird neatly with that one blow; this was equally a feat of self-confidence, of dexterity, of agility and of strength. I hold no man justified in condemning Commodus because he gloried in clubbing ostriches.

The incident I recall occurred when spring had already waned and was merging into summer. The lower tiers of the Colosseum were well filled with senators, nobles and other persons of sufficient importance to be invited. None of the Vestals were present and their box was occupied by Marcia and her intimates. There were enough spectators seated to give the amphitheater an appearance of gaiety and vivacity almost as great as if it had been filled by all classes of the populace. The weather was clear, warm and sunny, with a light, soft breeze.

Commodus had exhibited his dexterity as an archer by shooting a great number and great variety of small antelopes, each one of which he had killed with a single arrow. Next he began clubbing ostriches and disposed of a dozen or more. Altogether there were about fifty. It was characteristic of Commodus that he was impatient of any delay between different exhibitions when he was thus displaying his prowess. After the ostriches he intended to mount his platform and shoot fifty or sixty lions. In order to have them handy to begin on as soon as the last ostrich was despatched he had commanded that those which were to be let out of posterns should be disposed behind the doors and that some of the cages of those which were to be liberated from cages should be hoisted from the crypt and set ready

in the arena. A full dozen of such cages had been set out. I was not with the gang hoisting these cages and marshalling other lions behind posterns, but was at the opposite end of the arena with a smaller gang which was engaged in getting ready a score or more of tigers which were to be let out after the lions and which were giving a great deal of trouble.

Commodus was facing my end of the arena and so had his back to the lions in their cages, which were about thirty yards from him. The liberated ostriches did not seem to pay any attention to the caged lions and each, as he was driven back towards Commodus by men with long hay-forks, with which they caught the birds' necks and held them off, turned furiously on Commodus and charged him viciously. Each bird Commodus dodged with one slight instantaneous and effortless movement; each bird fell dead at once, neatly clubbed on the head.

As he clubbed the last ostrich I saw a lion step dazedly and tentatively out of one of the cages. Of course, it was not intended that any of the lions should be liberated until the Emperor had mounted his platform, approved the bow selected for him or chosen one for himself, and similarly inspected and approved as many arrows as he expected to need. It was hardly possible that any cage-door came open by accident. I conjectured a plot similar to that which I had seen fail when the piebald horse threw himself and his fall and the wreck of the chariot he helped to draw failed to cause the death of Palus the Charioteer.

The lion, once he was wholly out of his cage, sneaked forward his length or more, crouched, and bounded towards Commodus. A shout of dismay, horror and warning went up from the audience. Marcia shrieked and leapt to her feet. Most of the spectators also stood up, the audience rising in a sort of wave as it emitted its yell of consternation.

Commodus whirled round, saw the lion, stood and eyed him precisely as if he had been a charging ostrich; appeared to measure the diminishing distance, showed no sign of perturbation, crouched slightly, dodged as the lion sprang at

him; dodged so slightly that I was sure the lion had him, but so effectively that no claw touched him; straightened up as the lion, wholly in the air, shot past him; swung his short club and brought it down on the lion's neck; and stood there, triumphant, by a lion stretched out motionless on the sand, totally limp and unmistakably dead.

Marcia fainted.

So did half her guests.

So did some of the older senators.

Commodus, not so much as noticing the perturbation of his guests, not even Marcia, called out to the overseer in charge of the cages:

"Not a man of you dare move. Stand where you are."

The guards, a batch of whom were stationed at each postern by which the attendants entered and left the arena, ran towards the Emperor. He ordered them to summon all their fellows from all through the Colosseum and when their chief officer approached him gave orders that they form a cordon behind the cages and see to it that no man of those who had been getting out the cages should escape.

While this was being done the spectators had reseated themselves, the inanimate had been revived and even Marcia had recovered consciousness and composure and, with her guests was as before their fright.

When all were in order Commodus ordered:

"Let out another lion!"

The overseer in charge of the cages and the officer of the guards demurred.

"Do as I tell you!" Commodus browbeat the overseer. To the officer he said:

"If I, with only a tunic and club, am not afraid of a lion charging me, you and your men, in armor and with shields and swords ought not to be afraid."

"We are not," the officer declared, "we are concerned for you, not for ourselves."

"Pooh!" said Commodus. "If I could kill the first handily when I was not expecting him, I can kill all the rest the same way when I know what is coming. A lion, by that

sample, is as easy to dodge and club dead as an ostrich or easier. Send me another."

Another was let out amid the dead silence of the dazed and astounded spectators. Commodus killed the second as handily as the first.

Now I must say that no exploit recorded of any human being or traditional of any legendary hero, outclasses as a feat of strength, coolness, courage and perfect coordination of all the mental and physical faculties, this act of Commodus' in killing two successive lions with a palm-wood club. A charging lion is an object so terrifying as to chill the blood of a distant onlooker. Very unusually good nerves and very exceptional self-confidence are required to face with composure a portent which appears so irresistible. And when the lion emits his tremendous roar and rises, bodily, into the air in his mortal spring, mouth wide open, its crimson cavern glaring, teeth gleaming, eyes blazing, mane erect, paws spread, claws wide, the stoutest heart might well quail. Yet, after barely escaping one lion, this foolhardy coxcomb, this vainglorious madcap, joyously called for another and jauntily despatched him: whatever may be said against Commodus as a man and an Emperor, as an athlete he believed in himself and justified his belief.

He called for a third, in spite of Marcia's shrieks, gesturing to her to sit down and keep still, and laughing up at her. But by this time Aemilus Lætus, who was afterwards the last Prefect of the Prætorium to Commodus and who was then an officer of the Guards, superior to the officer who had protested, approached, saluted and spoke to the Emperor. Their conference was conducted in tones too low to be overheard, but it was afterwards reported, both by those who claimed to learn of it from Commodus and by those who claimed to have been informed by Lætus, that he had urged upon the Emperor that his personal importance to the Republic was too great for him to risk himself so needlessly, and that Commodus had yielded to his expostulations.

At any rate Commodus ordered arrested and bound the

entire gang who had been handling the lions' cages. He then walked up to them and enquired who had let out that lion. When no one confessed to having been responsible and several were accused by their fellows, the Emperor gave orders to lead off all concerned, hale them not before the Palace court, nor the commission in charge of prosecutions for offences against Imperial Majesty, but before the regular public magistrate in charge of trials for murder, assassination, poisoning, homicidal conspiracy and the like.

"Let him put the entire gang to the torture," the Emperor was reported as ordering. "Let him prosecute his enquiry until he gets a confession plainly naming the man who bribed the poor wretch who left that cage half-fastened, or the man who bribed the man who forced him to do it, or the whole chain of scoundrels, from the noble millionaire conspirators who hatched the idea, through their rabble of go-betweens down to the fool who hocussed that door-snap."

After the prisoners were marched off Commodus had the herald apologize for the interruption of the entertainment, proclaim that it would now proceed and request everyone to remain to enjoy it. Then he mounted his platform.

Yet this was his last exhibition of himself in the rôle of beast-slayer. I conjecture that as the episode of the piebald horse enlightened him as to the facilities for unobtrusive assassination afforded his enemies by his public appearances as a charioteer, so this episode of the accidentally liberated lion awakened him to the ease with which it might be arranged, whenever he entered the arena as a beast-slayer, that some monster might be loosed at him rather than for him. At any rate he never again took his stand in the arena for his long idolized sport. Beast-slaying he thenceforth eschewed.

Of course it was not by any means at once that we in the Choragium realized that the Emperor had abandoned his vagary. We knew only that we were suddenly unemployed and were merely glad of the respite and then uneasy at the change. I had time to reflect how marvellous had been my

luck. Commodus himself had three several times asked me questions about my ability to control beasts; Galen had many times stood by me or passed near me, often with his eyes apparently meeting mine. Satronius Satro had stood and gazed at me, not three yards away. A score of other senators, all of whom had known me in the days of my prosperity, had been as near me, and noblemen to the number of something like a hundred. Not one of these had identified me.

If I escaped recognition it was, I conjectured, because of the deep-seated habit of mind of noblemen and more exalted personages and of men, like Galen, who have risen to a station in life which places them on an equality with nobles; the habit of mind which makes them regard a slave not as a human being, to be looked at as an individual, as they look at an equal or any freeman, but as a mere object like a door, or gate or piece of statuary or of furniture or a sort of utensil. Such men look full at a slave, if unknown to them, without really perceiving him. From this cause, I conceive, I escaped recognition, detection, and annihilation.

Much less than a month after the episode of Commodus and the two lions I was reading in my quarters, when the slave detailed as my personal servant entered and, cringing, said that there was a gentleman who wanted to see me. I gazed at him severely and said:

"I think you are mistaken. Please remember what the procurator told you about persons desiring to intrude on me."

The fellow fairly cowered, visibly sweating and trembling, but insisted:

"I really think that you really will be glad to see this gentleman."

I perceived that some unusual enticement must have been offered the pitiful wretch to induce him to brave the terrors of the punishments with which the procurator had threatened him if he allowed any would-be visitors to reach me. It also appeared to me that the fellow was fond of me and had the best of intentions.

"Show the gentleman up," I finally said.

He had been gone but a very short time when the door opened and in came. . . .

Tanno!

He shut the door fast and, without a word, we were clasped in a close embrace.

When our emotions quieted sufficiently I pressed Tanno into a chair and resumed mine. We gazed at each other some time before either mastered himself enough for words. Tanno spoke first, veiling his feelings beneath his habitual jocularity. He said:

"Caius, you are certainly unkillable or bear a charmed life. You have been officially certified as dead two several times. First you were butchered by the Prætorians at Ortona, then you were assassinated by a disgruntled public-slave in the Umbrian Mountains: after two demises here you are, as alive as possible. Please explain."

"I feel faint," I said, "and, illogically, both thirsty and hungry."

I signalled for my servitor and, almost at once, he brought plenty of the Choragium's more than passable wine, fresh bread and a variety of cold viands. A draught of wine and a mouthful of bread and ham made me feel myself. Then I told about my close shaves when I three several times barely escaped assassination at the hands of partizans of Bulla, about the kindness of the *Villicus* and procurator and why I had changed my name.

"Why didn't you send at least a tiny note to Vedia and let her know you were alive after all?" he queried.

"I have lain awake night after night," I replied, "composing letters to Vedia and to you, letters which would tell you what I wanted if, by good luck, they came into your hands, but which, if they fell into the hands of secret-service agents, would tell nothing and not so much as arouse enough suspicion to cause them to investigate me and take a look at me. I could not frame, to my satisfaction, even one such letter. I knew that any messenger I employed would most likely post off to some Imperial spy and show

him my letter before he took it to its destination or instead of delivering it. I canvassed every possible messenger, from my personal servitor here in the Choragium, through all the slaves I knew here or in the Colosseum who are free to run about the city, up to every sort of street-gamin, idler, loafer, sycophant and what not. I could not think of any kind of messenger who would be safe, nor of any letter which would not be dangerous. Much as I wanted to apprise Vedia of my survival I could not but feel that any attempt on my part to communicate with her or with you would lead straight to betrayal, detection, recognition and the death from which Agathemer saved me."

"I believe you were right," Tanno agreed. "It has all come out for the best. You are alive and unsuspected and I have found you."

"How did you find me?" I queried.

"Galen," he said, to my astonishment, "told me that you were sheltered in the Choragium, cloaked under the style and title of Festus the Beast-Tamer. He said he recognized you last fall, but did not judge it wise to give me or Vedia so much as a hint as long as you were busy in the arena in full view of all Rome on festival days and under the eyes of our entire nobility during our Prince's exhibitions of himself as Hercules Delirans. When Commodus abruptly realized that beast-killing might not suit his health because of the opportunities it gave for accidentally letting lions or tigers or what not out of their cages at unexpected moments, since he was not likely to revert to his renounced sport and you were not likely to be so much in demand and therefore less likely to be much under observation, Galen thought it safe to tell me. He says he has always believed that you had nothing to do with Egnatius Capito's conspiracy, had merely been seen by some secret-service agent while talking to Capito, never were a member of his conspiracy, never conspired against Commodus, never were disloyal, have never been and are not any danger to our Prince, and therefore are a man to be shielded rather than informed on. So he kept his face when he recognized you in the

arena masquerading as Festus and kept his counsel till he judged the time ripe to tell me.

"I at once told Vedia, in person and privately. She is overjoyed, and, just as her encounter with you on the Flaminian Road not only stopped her proposed marriage to Orensius Pacullus, but made her feel she never wanted to hear of him again, so your resurrection and reappearance now has spoiled an apparently prosperous wooing of her by Flavius Clemens, who is as good a fellow as lives; noble, rich, handsome, charming and just such a suitor as Vedia might and should have married if you were really dead, and one she could not, in any case, help flirting with. She must have admiration, attention and admirers. With all her love of gaiety she loves you unalterably."

"I infer," I said, "that she told you of our encounter on the Flaminian Way."

"She did," he answered, "and gave me a full report of your story of your adventures from Plosurnia's Tavern till she saw you. As soon as we conferred we both started to use all our influence and any amount of cash necessary (we both have cash to spare, hoards of it) to arrange for your legal manumission by the *fiscus,* your disappearance, and your comfort in some secure shelter until it might be safe for you to reappear as yourself in your proper station in society.

"We found we should have no difficulty in arranging for your manumission. It has already been favorably reported on the recommendation of the authorities of Nuceria. We had only to slip a small bribe or two to expedite matters. But when we sent off a dependable agent, armed with all the necessary papers, to set you free from your captivity on the Imperial estate, and provide you with plenty of cash to make everything smooth for your disappearance, he was confronted with a most circumstantial story of your assassination and burial, with the official reports of both and the affirmation of an upper inspector who had investigated the matter.

"We could not but think you dead in fact and Vedia was

as heartbroken as five years ago, if not more so, for the glamour of that romantic encounter with you was magical. I believed you dead and was astounded when Galen gave me his information. Vedia is as amazed as I."

After some mutual desultory chat he fell to questioning me about my adventures and, drinking and eating when the humor took us, we spent most of the day together, I rehearsing for him all that I had told Vedia and much more in detail and also telling of all which had befallen me since then.

When Tanno left, it was as late as he could possibly remain and yet reach the Baths of Titus in time for the briefest bath there.

Next day he came again.

By this time both he and I had had time to think over the situation and to arrive at definite conclusions as to what was best to do. I was delighted to find that his ideas and mine agreed as to all essentials.

When he first came in he said:

"I had mighty little sleep last night. I could hardly close my eyes for thinking over your marvellous adventures. The more I ponder over them the more wonderful they seem; especially your involvement with Maternus; your encounter with Pescennius Niger; your presence in the Circus Maximus when Commodus:—I mean Palus:—drove his car over the axles of the stalled chariots and escaped between them out of the smash and wreckage; your involvement with the mutineers, and your safety in Rome all these months, even in the arena of the amphitheater. I congratulate you."

Then he told me his plan which he had already talked over with Vedia and which she approved. There happened to be in Rome a distinguished and wealthy provincial of senatorial rank, about to leave for Africa, where his estates were situated and where he owned vast properties near Carthage, Hippo Regius, Hadrumetum, Lambæsis and Thysdrus, in all of which places he had residences of palatial proportions and luxury. He had been making enquiries among his

acquaintances for a slave much of the sort Agathemer had been to me. He had not found one to suit him. Tanno thought that I would suit him and could easily pass myself off as the sort of man he wanted. Then I would get out of Rome unsuspected and be comfortable and well treated in the most Italian of all our out-provinces, in a delightful climate, amid abundance of all the good things of life.

I agreed with him.

Then he disclosed his plan for bringing this about. By influence or bribing or both he would arrange to have me sold out of the Choragium, ostensibly as now superfluous there, and to have me bought from the *fiscus* by a dependable and close-mouthed go-between buyer, who would agree to hold me for quick resale to a purchaser designated by Tanno. Thus Nonius Libo, the wealthy provincial who was to be induced to purchase me, would know nothing of my identity with Festus the Animal Tamer or of my connection with the Choragium.

I acclaimed this project as far more promising than Vedia's plan to seclude me in the dreary wilds of Bruttium.

Tanno gave me a letter and went off. I found the missive a long and loving letter from Vedia: one to soothe and transport any lover.

Tanno had said that he would not visit me again except as was absolutely needful, considering it reckless and venturesome to run the risk of some Imperial spy noticing his visits to the Choragium and making investigations. Though he remarked that no man in Rome seemed less likely than he to be suspected of disloyalty, intrigue or of being a danger to the Prince.

Within a very few days he paid me one more visit to inform me that everything had gone well, that all necessary arrangements had been made for my sale by the *fiscus* out of the Choragium, and all necessary preparations made to take full advantage of it.

A few days later I was formally sold for cash to a provincial slave-dealer, named Olynthides. In a slave-barrack which he had hired for the month only I found myself with

a motley crew, but kept apart from them and comfortably lodged, well fed and considerately treated, as valuable merchandise.

The day after Olynthides had bought me Nonius Libo came to inspect me. He talked to me in Latin and in Greek, commended my fluency and polish in the use of both, had me write out a letter in each at his dictation, read both and commended my accuracy, script and speed; questioned me about the history of music, painting, and sculpture and as to my opinions on the works of various sculptors, painters, architects and composers; asked about my tastes along these lines and as to jewelry, fine furniture, tapestries, carpets and the like; also as to my personal tastes concerning lodging, bathing, hunting, food and clothing and was I a good sailor and fond of the sea; and stated that I suited him.

I was not present at his chaffering with Olynthides but, after no long interval I was summoned into the courtyard and Olynthides handed me over to Nonius Libo, along with a bill of sale.

CHAPTER XXXII

PHORBAS

OLYNTHIDES had said to me:

"I make it a point always to forget the names of the slaves I buy for cash without any guarantees and resell the same way. I have as bad a memory for names as any man alive and I help my bad memory to be as much worse as I can. I'll forget your name in a few days. I am not sure I remember it now. What is it?"

I was ready for him, for I had made up my mind to change my name again and had selected my new name.

"Phorbas,," I answered.

"Oh, yes!" he ruminated, "Phorbas, to be sure. I should have said Florus or Foslius or something like that. Phorbas!

I'll remember Phorbas till after you are sold and the cash in my hands and you and your new master out of sight. Then I'll forget that too, like all the rest."

As Phorbas, Phorbas the Art Connoisseur, I began my life with Nonius. He was domiciled in a palace of a residence on the Carinæ, which he had leased for the short term of his proposed stay in Rome. There I was lodged in a really magnificent apartment, with a private bath, a luxurious bedroom, a smaller bedroom for the slave detailed to wait on me, a tiny *triclinium* and a jewel of a sitting-room, gorgeous with statuettes and paintings, crammed with objects of art and walled with a virtuoso's selection of the best books of the best possible materials and workmanship.

There I spent some happy days. Nonius had told me I might go out all I pleased. I had replied that I preferred to remain indoors until we set out for Carthage. He smiled, nodded and said:

"I understand: do as you like."

I passed my time most agreeably, except for several intrusions by Libo's wife, Rufia Clatenna. She was a tall, rawboned, lean woman, with unmanageable hair which would not stay crimped, a hatchet face, too much nose and too little chin, a stringy neck, very large, red, knuckly hands and big flat feet. She had a mania for economy and close bargains, seemed to regard her husband as an easy mark for swindlers and to be certain that he had been cheated when he bought me. She thought herself an art-expert, whereas she had no sound knowledge of any branch of art, no memory for what she had heard and seen, and no taste whatever. To demonstrate that her husband had made a bad bargain when he bought me she bored me with endless questions concerning the contents of her domicile, of which she understood almost nothing, and concerning famous composers, painters, sculptors and architects, as to whom she confused the few names, dates and works she thought she knew about.

Nonius came on us in his atrium while she was putting me through a questionnaire on every statue, painting and

carving in it. The first time he saw me alone he said, smiling:

"You mustn't mind her; I put up with her, you can, too."

When he came into my apartment and told me he meant to set off from Rome next day, I ventured to express my puzzlement that he had bought me and never mentioned to me, since I came into his possession, any of the subjects on which he had questioned me and for knowledge of which he had, presumably, wanted me.

"Oh," he said, "I didn't buy you for myself. I know very little about art and music and am no connoisseur at all. I bought you for my cousin Pomponius Falco. He is as much interested in such matters as any man in Africa. He is richer than I and you'll find him the best possible master. He'll be at Carthage when we get there and I'll resell you to him soon after we land."

Nonius and Clatenna had no children, but doted on her sister's son, a lad of not much over twenty, lean as his aunt, but small boned and not unshapely. He was not, however, handsome, for he had a pasty, grayish complexion, thin lank hair, almost no beard, and a long nose suggesting a proboscis. His name was Rufius Libo, and he was Nonius Libo's heir. In his favor Nonius made a will a few days before we left Rome, leaving him his entire estate except a jointure to Clatenna, endowments to some municipal institutions in his home towns, legacies to various friends and manumission to faithful slaves. Of this will he had several duplicates made and properly witnessed and sealed. One of these he left on deposit in Rome; another he despatched to Carthage by a special messenger by way of Rhegium, Messana, the length of Sicily to Lilybæum and thence by sea to Carthage; and he gave one each to Clatenna and to Rufius.

When he gave orders for the despatch of the copy of his will by the special messenger I was astonished, as I assumed that we were to travel by the same route. But I found that he meant to sail all the way from the Tiberside

water-front of Rome to Carthage. This amazed me. And not unnaturally. For we Romans generally dislike or even abhor the sea and sail it as little as possible, making our journeys as much as we can by land and as little as may be by water, choosing any detour by land which will shorten what crossings of the sea cannot be avoided.

Among the few Romans whom I have known who enjoy sea voyages I count myself. Of all of them Nonius outclassed the rest. He worshiped the water and was happiest when afloat and well out to sea. He told me that he had spent more money on his private yacht than on any of his residences, and, when I saw her, I believed him. A larger, better designed, better equipped, better manned, better supplied, better appointed private yacht I never beheld. His rowers kept perfect time and made top speed all down the Tiber, her crew set sail like man-of-warsmen, her officers were pattern seamen and got the very most speed on their way from every condition of wind and weather. Rufius and Clatenna, while not as good sailors as Nonius and I, were notably good sailors and we had a very pleasant voyage until we were almost in sight of Carthage. Then we encountered a really terrific storm.

Now I am not going into any details of our disaster. I do not know whether all writers of memoirs get shipwrecked or all survivors of shipwrecks write reminiscences, but I am certain that of all the countless memoirs I have read in the course of my life, ninety-nine out of every hundred contained one or more accounts of shipwrecks, narrated with the minutest detail and dwelling on the horrors, agonies, miseries, fears, discomforts and uncertainties of the survivors and narrators with every circumstance calculated to harrow up their readers' feelings. I could write a similar meticulous narrative of my only shipwreck, and it was sufficiently uncomfortable, terrifying, ghastly and hideous to glut a reader as greedy of horrors as could be, but I am going to pass over it as lightly as possible and summarize it as briefly as I may.

Suffice it to set down here that we were not driven on

any rock or reef or shoal nor did we collide with any other ship. Laboring heavily in the open sea, straining on the crests and wallowing in the troughs of the stupendous billows, the yacht, even as carefully built a yacht as Libo's, began to leak appallingly, the inrush of the water surpassed the utmost capacity of the pumps and the most frantic efforts of the men at them; the vessel settled lower and lower, labored more and more heavily and was manifestly about to founder.

The officers were capable men, the small boats sturdy and their crews and steersmen skillful and confident. Clatenna was brave and Libo magnificent. He kept his head, dominated his officers, and insisted that Rufius and I should embark in a different boat from that to which he and Clatenna trusted themselves. He personally saw to it that Clatenna and Rufius had, on their persons, each their copy of his will.

Both boats were successfully launched, and, as we drew away from the doomed ship, we saw a third and fourth put off with other valued members of his household. While a fifth and sixth were being swung overboard we saw, from the top of a huge swell, the yacht go under and vanish; saw, when we next rose on the chine of a billow, the water dotted with spars, wreckage and swimmers; saw, five or six times more, the three other boats: and then many times, high on a vast wave, beheld only the waste of lifeless waters, without boat or swimmer.

All night we floated and, not long after sunrise, we were seen and rescued by a trading ship from Carales in Sardinia, bound for Carthage.

At Carthage we were soon in the palace formerly Libo's and now the property of Rufius. He, on succeeding to his uncle's estate, at once rewarded with a huge donation the steersman of the boat in which we had been saved, saying that the other steersmen did their best, but that, if the others had been as dexterous as he, his aunt and uncle would not have perished by so deplorable and so untimely a death.

Within a few days he, now my owner by inheritance, sold me to Pomponius Falco, as Nonius had intended to do himself.

Falco liked me at first sight and I him. He was a man between thirty-five and forty years of age, a natural born bachelor and art connoisseur. He was of medium height, of stout build, with curly black hair and a curly black beard, a swarthy complexion, a bullet head, a bull neck, a huge chest and plump arms and legs. He was by no means unhandsome in appearance and very jovial, good-humored, and good-natured; manifestly fond of all the good things of life and able to discriminate and appreciate the best.

For several days after I came into his possession I was his dearest toy. He spent most of his waking hours conversing with me about music and musicians, poetry and poets, literature and authors, paintings and painters, statuary and sculptors, architecture and architects, gems, ivories, embroideries, textiles, furniture, pottery and even autographs and autograph collecting. He seemed to appraise me an expert on all such lines and to be well pleased with his purchase.

Certainly I was as well clothed, fed, lodged and attended as if I had been his twin-brother.

Before he had owned me many days Falco said to me:

"Phorbas, I've been puzzling about you. You are a slave and you were sold to poor Libo and by Rufius to me as a Greek. Yet you have none of the appearance nor behavior of a Greek nor yet of a slave. You look and act and talk like a freeman born and a full-blooded Roman, and a noble at that. Please explain."

Now, of course, in imagining all the forms in which I might be assaulted by the perils which beset me, I had foreseen just such a query as this utterance of Falco's involved and I had pondered and rehearsed my answer. I realized that I must be ready with a reply wholly plausible because entirely consonant with the facts of our social life, as they existed, so that no one could take any exception to it. I thought I had framed such a reply.

"You know how it is," I answered easily. "A Roman master buys a young and comely Greek handmaid. In due course she has a daughter, legally also a slave and nominally a Greek, yet half Roman. When she is grown, if she happens to be comely and the property of a master like most masters, she has a daughter, a slave and spoken of as a Greek, yet only a quarter Greek. If she has a similar daughter, that daughter, a slave and called a Greek, is only one-eighth Greek. I conceive, from all I know, that my great grandmother, grandmother and mother were such slave women. I, a slave and ostensibly a Greek, am fifteen-sixteenths Roman noble, by ancestry, according to my reckoning. No wonder my descent shows in my bearing, manner and conversation."

This answer was, actually, not so far from the facts, my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother had, certainly, been Roman noblewomen, daughters indeed, each of one of the oldest and longest-lineaged houses of our nobility; and, like my father, grandfather and great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather had been a Roman nobleman. But his father, my great-great-great-grandfather, had been a freedman, manumitted in the days of Nero, acquiring great wealth, attaining equestrian rank during the last years of Nero's reign, and vastly enriched during the confusion of the civil wars, marrying a young and wealthy widow after Vespasian was firmly established at Rome by the crushing of the insurrection of Claudius Civilis.

Probably the general consonance of my answer with the facts made my utterance of it more convincing. Certainly it appealed to Falco.

"Just about what I conjectured," he said, smiling. "And will you tell me in what part of Italy and on what estate you were born and how you came by your air of aristocratic culture and by your marvellous dilettantism?"

"I know what I know and am what I am," I replied, "because I was, from childhood, treated just as if a son instead of a slave; pampered, indulged and made much of. That lasted till I was more than full-grown.

"The misfortunes of the family to which I belonged came

so suddenly that I was not manumitted, as I should have been had my master had so much as a day's warning of his downfall. I was sold to a fool and a brute, as you have probably inferred from my back. The marks of his barbarity which I bear, and my lasting grief for the calamity of the household in which I was born, make me unwilling to tell you anything of my past previous to my purchase from Olynthides by Nonius Libo."

"Well," he said, "your feeling is natural and I shall not urge my curiosity on you. I mean to indulge you and even pamper you; mean to endeavor to indulge you and pamper you so you will feel more indulged and pampered than ever in your life. I'll make a new will, at once, leaving you your freedom and a handsome property. I expect to live out a long life, all my kin have been healthy and long-lived. But one can never be certain of living and I mean to run no risks of your having any more troubles. You deserve ease and comfort. And you shall have them if I can arrange it. I love you like a born brother and mean to treat you as well as if you were my twin."

The year in which Commodus killed the two lions, each with one blow of his trifling-looking little palm-wood club, in which year I was sold out of the Choragium, and purchased by Nonius, in which I crossed the sea, was wrecked and saved and resold to Falco, was the nine hundred and forty-first year of the City * and the ninth of the reign of Commodus, the year in which the consuls were Allius Fuscianus and Duillius Silanus, each for the second time. In Africa, with Falco, I spent that and the following year very comfortably and happily, for I was as well clothed, fed, lodged and tended as Falco himself. I liked him, even loved him, and I felt perfectly safe.

The climate of Africa agreed with me, and I liked the fare, especially the many kinds of fruit which we seldom see in Rome and then not in their best condition, and some

* 188 A.D.

of which we never see in Italy at all. I admired the scenery, and I delighted in the cities, not only Carthage and Utica, but both Hippo Regius and Hippo Diarrhytus, and also Hadrumetum, Tacape, Cirta and Theveste, and even such mere towns as Lambæsis and Thysdrus, which last has an amphitheater second only to the Colosseum itself. They all had fine amphitheaters, magnificent circuses, gorgeous theaters and sumptuous public hot baths. Not one but had a fine library, a creditable public picture-gallery, and many noble groups of statuary, with countless fine statues adorning the public buildings, streets and parks. The society of all these places was delightfully cultured, easy and unaffected. I revelled in it and could not have been happier except that I never heard from Vedia or Tanno, let alone had a letter from either. And I wrote to both and sent off letter after letter to one or the other. For it seemed to me that a letter in this form could not excite any suspicion.

"Phorbas gives greeting to Opsitius, and informs him that after he had been sold by Olynthides to Nonius Libo, he survived the sinking of his owner's yacht and was sold by Libo's heir to Pomponius Falco, in whose retinue he now is. Farewell."

I sent off, at least once a season, a letter like this to both Tanno and Vedia. No word from either ever reached me. I could but conjecture that all my letters had miscarried.

Meanwhile, besides being reminded of it each time I wrote to Tanno or Vedia, I did not forget that I was a proscribed fugitive, my life forfeit if I were detected. I conceived that my best disguise was to dress, act and talk as much as possible in the character of dilettante art expert and music-lover, which I had assumed. Falco treated me, as he had prophesied, almost as a brother. I had a luxurious apartment in each of his town residences and country villas, and a retinue of servants: valet, bath-attendant, room-keeper, masseur, reader, messenger, runner and a litter with three shifts of powerful bearers. Everything Falco could think of in the way of clothing, furniture and art objects was show-

ered on me and my slightest hint of a wish was quickly gratified. Also Falco supplied me a lavish allowance of cash. Therefore I could gratify any whim. Besides, my amulet-bag was intact and had in it all the gems which Agathemer had originally placed there, except only the emerald Bulla had sold for me.

I thought up everything I could do to make myself look completely a Greek virtuoso and as un-Roman-looking as possible. I patronized every complexion-specialist, friseur, perukier, manicurist and fashionable barber in that part of the world. I bought every hair tonic for sale in the colony. Between lotions and expert manipulation I succeeded in growing a thick curly beard, covering my chest as far as the lower end of my breast-bone and a thick head of hair so long that, even when elaborately frizzed and curled, my oiled and scented locks fell as far down my back as my beard spread on my bosom. Nothing could have made me look more Corinthian and less Roman.

I wore the gaudiest clothing I could find; tunics and cloaks of pure silk and of the brightest or most effeminate hues; crimson, emerald-green, peacock-green, grass-green, apple-green, sea-green, sapphire-blue, sky-blue, turquoise-blue, saffron, orange, amethystine, violet and any and every unusual tint; boots of glazed kidskin or of dull finish soft skin, of hues like my silk garments, always with the edges of the soles heavily gilded. And, for my shoes as well as for my garments, I chose particolored materials with the most startling or languorous combinations of unusual dyes. All my boots and shoes were embroidered in silver thread or gold thread, all my outer garments embroidered in crimson, deep green, deep blue, gold or silver, in big, striking, conspicuous patterns. I had elephants, lions, antelopes, horses, cattle, sheep, stags, goats, storks, cranes, even fish embroidered on my outer garments amid trees, vines, and flowers; roses, lilies, violets, poppies and others uncountable. I spent on such gewgaws a considerable part of my allowance, yet never exhausted Falco's lavish provision for me.

I also went in for jewelry, loading my fingers with flashy

ings, wearing bracelets on both wrists, two or three on each, lways two necklaces and even earrings, for which I had my ars pierced, like a Lydian.

When I conned myself in my dressing-room mirror, arayed in such a superfluity of decorations and fripperies, I elt sure that no one would take me for a Roman.

In these apparently natural vanities and vagaries Falco umored me, enquiring of his friends concerning friseurs of cclaimed reputation, buying me any gaudy fabrics he saw, lso presenting me with caskets of necklaces, amulets, braceets, finger-rings and earrings. He rallied me on my oriental astes, but aided me to gratify them.

He even came to feel his interest in jewelry and gems enanced by my fad for them. He took to purchasing aniques in jewelry and rare and unusual gems and his hoard rew into a notable collection.

By the end of my second winter with Falco I had come o know intimately all his town and country palaces and all is dilettanti friends and had enjoyed to the full the many elights of the colony, not only its climate and fruits, its cenery and cities, its statuary and pictures, its libraries and ublic-baths, but its excellent performances of tragedies and omedies, and its spectacles creditable, not only as to chariotacing but also as to beast-fights and exhibitions of gladiaors. I found life in Africa extremely agreeable and looked orward to any length of it with contentment.

I may remark that during this time Cleander came to the nd of his period of unlimited wealth, power and misrule. was thus out of Rome at the time of his downfall and eath and while the Prætorium had a score of Prefects in apid succession.

In the spring of the nine hundred and forty-third year f the city,* and the eleventh of the reign of Commodus, the ear in which he was nominally consul for the sixth time, long with Petronius Septimianus, Falco startled me, while

* A.D. 190.

we were dining alone together, as Agathemer and I had used to dine together, by saying:

"Phorbas, you talk of Rome differently from any other man I ever heard talk of it. I have meditated over the quality of what you say of Rome, but I cannot analyze it or describe it accurately. Yet I may say that others talk of Rome as holy ground, but you alone make me feel that the soil inside the Pomœrium is holy ground: others talk of the grandeur of Rome; you make me realize its grandeur: others prate of their love for Rome: you, saying little, make me tingle with a subtly communicated sense of how you love Rome: others babble of how life away from Rome is not life, but merely existence; of how any dwelling out of Rome is exile, of how they long for Rome; you, by some sorcery, make me not only feel how you long for Rome, but have awakened in me a longing for Rome. I have never been out of this colony of Africa, not even into Mauretania. A man as rich as I and of equestrian rank can afford to travel, to visit all the interesting parts of the Empire, to live where he likes, anywhere in Italy or even in Rome.

"I have never wanted to leave this colony: I love every bit of it and especially my residences and estates. I have been satisfied here. When my friends argued with me and tried to persuade me to travel and especially to visit Rome I never was convinced by their arguments. I have a dread of sea-voyaging, a dread accentuated by the death of poor Libo, who was an enthusiastic voyager and had a yacht as staunch and a crew as capable as skill could produce, money buy and judgment collect. Yet he perished. I did not need the warning of his fate to keep me ashore. Then again, I prefer to be a big frog in a small pond to being a small frog in a big pond. I am one of the most important men in this colony and, here in Africa, I am always somebody. In Rome I should be nobody.

"Yet, without my realizing it and later against my will your conversation, in some subtle way, has so infected me with the desire to see Rome that I am going to brave the terrors of the seas, am going to sink myself into insignifi-

cance among the scores of richer and more influential men who cluster about Cæsar. I am even going to put at the mercy of the sea my precious collection of gems, which I now value more than you and myself together and twice over.

"I have made all my arrangements. I have put my affairs in order, made sure that my estates will be properly managed in my absence, bought the best yacht to be had in the harbor of Carthage, and that is saying a great deal for its excellence, and I have ordered coffers in which to pack my beloved gems.

"Prepare to accompany me; within ten days we set off for Rome."

I knew Falco. Easy-going as he was, when he had taken a notion to buy and indulge a connoisseur-slave, collect gems or visit Rome, opposition, arguments, artfulness or stratagems were alike useless. I resigned myself to my fate.

I meditated over this fifth fulfillment of the prophecy of the Aemilian Sibyl.

Since I had been with Falco and practically a free and rich man, I had made handsome sacrifices at Mercury's Temples in all the cities we visited which had temples to Mercury. The morning after Falco announced his intentions to go to Rome I went out alone and unattended; myself, in the market place of Carthage, bought two white hens; myself carried them to the Temple of Mercury and myself had them offered to the god.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IMPOSTURE

WE had no bad weather on our voyage to Rome nor any adventure. The day before we sailed I had conned my image in the mirror in my dressing-room and had comforted myself with the decision that no human creature could

conceivably suspect of being a Roman this full-bearded, long-haired, long-nailed, frizzed, curled, oiled, perfumed, gaudy, tawdry, bedizened, bejeweled, powdered, rouged, painted popinjay.

I laid in an extra supply of nail-polish, nail-tint, rouge, face-paint, blackening for painting eyebrows and eyelashes, and of perfumery, cosmetics, unguents and such like. If I were sufficiently whitened, reddened, rouged, and painted I hoped I should be well enough disguised to face Gratillus or even Flavius Clemens without a qualm. Actually my bizarre and fantastic appearance was an almost complete protection to me.

And I needed protection. For Falco was related to many prominent families and men in Rome; for instance, he was a cousin of Senator Sosius Falco, who was consul two years later. He was introduced widely and at once and invited everywhere. I was constantly in attendance on him.

My experiences during my long stay at Rome with Falco were, in truth, amazing. He bought a fine palace on the Esquiline, near the Baths of Titus, furnished it lavishly, entertained magnificently and revelled in the life of Rome. At first I was busy showing him the chief sights of the City, then the minor sights, then coaching him in the niceties of social usages, then convoying him on the round of all notable sculptures, picture galleries, private collections of pictures or statuary, famous museums, repositories of all kinds of art objects and, especially, the gem collections, both private and public, particularly the large exhibit in the temple of Venus Genetrix, placed there by the Divine Julius and the smaller exhibit in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, donated by Octavia's son, Marcellus.

Later he divided his time between giving dinners and going out to dinners and haunting the houses of gem collectors and the shops of jewelers.

He began visiting jewelers' shops, to be sure, within a few days of our arrival in Rome. We had not been there ten days, in fact, when he made me conduct him to the

Porticus Margaritaria, on the Via Sacra, near the great Forum, which was and is the focus of pearl dealers and gem dealers in general in Rome.

There we entered several shops and, at last, I could not keep him out of that of Orontides, who had known me perfectly. His was unique among shops in Rome and probably was the largest and most splendid jewelry shop in all the world: more like a small temple of Hercules or a temple-treasury than a shop. It was not in the Pearl-Dealers' Arcade, where only small, square, usual shops were possible, but adjacent to it and entered from the Via Sacra. It was circular, with a door of cast bronze, beautifully ornamented with reliefs of pearl-divers, tritons, nereids and other marine subjects. Inside its dome-shaped roof was lined with an intricate mosaic of bits of glass as brilliant as rubies, emeralds and sapphires, or as gold and silver. The roof rested on a circular entablature with a very ornate cornice, under which was a frieze ornamented with reliefs, representing winged cupids working as gem-cutters and polishers, as chasers of salvers and goblets, and as goldsmiths and silversmiths. The architrave was as ornate as the cornice. The entablature was supported by eight Ionic columns of the slenderest and most delicate type, of dark yellow Numidian marble, while the lining of the wall-spaces was of the lighter yellow Mauretanian marble. Of the eight wall-spaces one was occupied by the doorway, over which was a bronze group representing a combat of two centaurs. On either side of the door was a wall-space ennobled by a niche with a life-size, bronze statue, one of Orontides' father, the other of his grandfather, both of whom had been distinguished gem-dealers at Antioch. Two more wall-spaces were occupied by ample windows, not of open lattices, but glazed with almost crystalline glass set in bronze, a form of window seldom seen except in great temples, the Imperial Palace, and the residences of the most opulent senators and noblemen.

The three wall-spaces behind the counter were filled from column to column with tiers of superposed recesses, in size

like the urn niches of a burial columbarium, but each closed with a door of cornel-wood carved and polished, behind which doors Orontides kept his precious merchandise.

The counter divided the shop across from window to window. It had in the middle a narrow wicket through which Orontides and his assistants could crawl in and out. Otherwise the outer face of the counter was of two blocks of Numidian marble, carved in patterns of twining vines; its top was of one long slab of the exquisitely delicate white marble from Luna. On it lay always squares of velvet, in color dark blue, black, dark green, and crimson, on which were admirably displayed his goldsmith work and jewelries.

Below the panels about each statued niche was a curved seat of Numidian marble amply large for four persons at once, so that eight prospective customers could sit and wait while as many stood at the counter; and, according to my recollection of the shop in the days of my prosperity, a shop crowded with customers was the rule rather than the exception with Orontides.

It was crowded when we entered. I, endeavoring to conserve a natural demeanor, felt my sight blur. I saw, as we entered, only a row of backs of customers standing at the counter: three in noblemen's togas, one in the toga of a senator, their fulldress boots conspicuously red beneath their robes; four in the silken garments of wealthy ladies, all in pale soft hues of exquisite Coan dyes.

Of these eight backs two, one of the lady midway of the counter, the other of her escort, appeared terrifyingly familiar.

In fact, when we entered I had three distinct shocks in quick succession. Flashy, painted and rouged as I was I dreaded Orontides' eyes. There he was behind his counter, visible through a rift in the press of handsomely dressed customers of both sexes.

Instinctively I glanced at the only other interval in the line of absorbed opulent backs.

Through it I recognized Agathemer smiling at me!

I saw that *he,* at least, recognized me at once and my

dread of Orontides intensified tenfold. I knew Agathemer would be discreet, loyal and trusty. I dreaded to lose countenance if I kept my eyes on his face and I looked elsewhere.

I recognized the back of Flavius Clemens!

If he turned round I felt I was lost. Yet I could not flee. Falco was certain to linger in the shop. I must keep my self-control and prepare to brazen out anything.

The next instant I recognized the back of the lady next Flavius Clemens.

Vedia!

As I recognized her she turned, saw me, knew me through my disguise, flushed, and turned back.

I should not have been surprised if she had fainted and crumpled up on the white and brown mosaic floor in front of the counter. She kept her feet and her outward self-possession.

Clemens spoke to her in an undertone.

"No," she answered him, in a choked voice, "I have changed my mind. I won't take these."

She was handling an unsurpassable necklace of big pearls.

He whispered to her.

"No," she said, curtly. "I won't look at any others. I think I'll go home."

He was so amazed that he never saw me or, I think, anything or anybody else in that shop just then. He escorted her out.

When I regained my self-possession enough to feel that I appeared at ease and could trust myself to glance at the other customers as I should have done had I been in fact what I was trying to appear, I was relieved to find that not one of them was more than distantly known to me.

The idlers on the benches showed no inclination to rise and approach the counter. Falco and I occupied the interval vacated by Clemens and Vedia. Agathemer, of all men on earth, asked what he could do for us. Falco stood there a long time, saw a goodly fraction of the finest jewels in Orontides' possession and, manifestly, made as favorable

impression of connoisseurship on Agathemer as Agathemer made on him. They eyed each other as fellow-adepts. Falco asked that he reserve an antique Babylonian seal cut in sardonyx and promised to send a messenger with its price before dark. Agathemer, who was passing under the name of Eucleides, blandly replied that Orontides would prefer to send the seal to Falco's residence. Falco agreed, of course, and to my unutterable relief we finally departed.

Agathemer—Eucleides—brought the seal; and timed his arrival neatly as Falco returned from the Baths of Titus just before dinner time. He was giving a big formal dinner and my dinner was to be served in my apartment, which had a tiny *triclinium;* being as lavishly appointed, and one in which I was as luxuriously lodged and served, as those I had had in Carthage and Utica.

I asked Agathemer if he could stay and dine with me and he accepted. We had a wonderful dinner. The food, of course, was unsurpassable and our appetites keyed up by our mutual emotions. When the dessert and wine were brought in I dismissed the waiters, made sure that no man or boy of my retinue was in my apartment and bolted its door.

Then we fell into each other's arms.

After we had expressed our mutual affection I told him my story from the morning after the massacre and he told me his, which was commonplace.

He had easily escaped from the slave-convoy between Narnia and Interamnia, had made his way to Ameria and found shelter there with slaves as an ordinary runaway slave. After a discreet interval he had travelled to Rome. There he had found old acquaintances to protect and shield him. I was presumed to be dead and any fellow-slave would help him in his situation, he being presumed to be legally a slave of the *fiscus.* He had no difficulty in disposing of a gem out of his amulet-bag and then rented lodgings, passed as a freedman, by the name of Eucleides, and gradually made himself known to various gem-experts who gave him as much protection as had his fellow-slaves, his former acquaintances.

Orontides perfectly knew who he was, yet engaged him as an assistant by the name of Eucleides and as being a freedman. Ever since then he had lived safe in his lodgings, and spent his days at Orontides' shop or about Rome at gem-dealers. He declared that he was, if possible, more of a gem-expert than before our adventures began, which was saying a great deal.

He laughed heartily and often at my disguise, acclaimed it a work of art in every detail and in its total effect and vowed that he believed that I could spend years in Rome in Falco's retinue and encounter all my old acquaintances and be in little danger from any and in no danger except from such professional physiognomists as Galen and Gratillus.

I told him of what Galen had said to Tanno. Agathemer said he had had only two interviews with Tanno, at which they had deplored my death, I having been believed to have perished with Nonius Libo. They had also agreed to avoid each other, for fear of attracting the notice of some secret-service agent or volunteer spy. Tanno had not mentioned Galen.

We agreed that we, also, must avoid each other and not meet oftener than say four times a year, for fear of leading to my detection.

He told me of Marcia's unlimited power over Commodus, the whole Palace and the entire social and governmental world of Rome. He also said that he was convinced that Ducconius Furfur was domiciled in the Palace and that Commodus used him as dummy ceremonial Emperor, when he himself was masquerading as Palus, the Gladiator, for he was now developing for public exhibitions of his swordsmanship a mania as insensate as those he had had for charioteering and beast-fighting.

Next day, naturally, I had a visit from Tanno, who even sacrificed his afternoon bath and came to see me while Falco was at the Baths of Titus.

He embraced me heartily, when we were alone, and talked with his habitual mask of jocularity.

"Three times dead, Caius," he said, "and still alive and fit. Dying seems to agree with you, whether it is military execution, rural assassination, or drowning at sea. I am still incredulous that you are really alive; we had the most circumstantial accounts of the loss of poor Libo's yacht with all on board."

"That is odd," I said, "Rufius Libo survived and succeeded to his uncle's property."

"I knew he inherited all Nonius left," Tanno stated, "but I had no idea that Nonius had Rufius with him here in Rome and that he was on the yacht; I thought he was in Carthage all the while. Certainly every account we had specified that no one was rescued from that yacht."

I told him that Rufius had promised me to write him of my survival and that I had despatched at least a score of letters to him and as many to Vedia. He was as puzzled as I that not one had reached either of them.

I gave him an account of my life since he had seen me and he approved of my disguise as much as had Agathemer and laughed at it even more heartily.

He said:

"Poor Flavius Clemens is in a daze. He cannot conjecture what has gone wrong with his wooing again a second time. He behaved very tactfully after his first rebuff ensuing on Galen's tip to me and mine to Vedia. He was so cautious about not thrusting himself on Vedia that their acquaintance, quite naturally, warmed again gradually into mutual interest and romantic affection and was ripening into love when the sight of you yesterday annihilated his excellent chances of marrying her. He was just about to buy for her a two-million-sesterce pearl necklace. If she had accepted the gift it would have been tantamount to a public pledge to marry him. Poor fellow!"

When he left he gave me a letter from Vedia, a letter as loving as a lover could wish for. She declared that she would not marry Flavius Clemens nor anybody except me and would wait for me as long as might be necessary or stay unmarried

until the end of her days, if, by any misfortune, the end came to her before she and I were free to marry.

She said that we must avoid each other as much as possible and that I must not spoil my chances of safety either by relying too recklessly on my disguise or through risking arousing suspicion in Falco by any attempt at confining myself to my apartment, which would have been altogether incongruous with the character I had assumed.

The rest of that year and all the winter I passed living the normal life of an indulged and pampered favorite of an opulent bachelor dilettante noble. It was a life almost as enjoyable as the life of a wealthy nobleman to which I had been born and brought up.

I had but one anxiety and that was not small and it steadily increased. It was caused by a progressive alteration and deterioration in the character of my master. In all other respects he remained the man he had been when he first bought me, but as a gem-fancier his hobby became a passion which deepened into a mania and colored, or discolored, all he did. He had, as he always had had, a very large surplus of income over and above what was needful to maintain his huge estates in Africa, his many luxurious villas and town-palaces there, his yacht and his palaces in Italy at Baiæ and at Rome. The normal accumulation of this surplus had taxed his sagacity as an investor, for it was always harder for him to find advantageous investments for his redundant cash than to find cash for tempting investments. Certainly his excess income more than sufficed for any reasonable indulgence in gem-collecting.

Yet his outlay for rare gems ran up to and outran and far outran his resources. The strange result was that he, who had huge revenues from estates and safe investments, desired a still greater income. He began to embark in risky ventures which promised large and quick returns. He went into partnership with two different nobles, who made a practice of bidding on the taxes of frontier provinces exposed to enemy raids. Bidders were shy of investing their cash in

the problematical returns of such regions and those who had the hardihood to enter into contracts with the government made huge profits if lucky. Falco was lucky each time. He plunged again and again.

He also embarked similarly in bidding for unpromising contracts and in buying up estates thrown unexpectedly on the market. All his ventures turned out successfully, he gained great resources for indulging his fad for gems and rare curios, his collection grew and became one of the most famous private collections in Rome.

Also his mania for speculation grew as fast as his mania for collecting gems.

This led to my exposure to the oddest and most alarming peril which I had run since Agathemer and I crawled through the drain-pipe at Villa Andivia; greater I think, than the risk I ran when I nearly encountered Gratillus at Placentia. This happened about eleven months after I came to Rome with Falco, in the spring of the year when Pedo Apronianus and Valerius Bradua were consuls.

This occurrence and the circumstances which led up to it I cannot forbear narrating, but I shall not go into details, for it involves at least allusion to behavior not at all creditable to my owner and I am unwilling to disparage or seem to disparage one who was to me a dear friend and a generous benefactor. The truth is that his passion for gem-collecting had not only undermined his character but had, in a way, sapped the foundations of his native uprightness. If he had remained the man he was when he bought me he would not have been capable of entertaining, let alone of acting on, the considerations which actuated him.

He thought he saw a chance to make vast profits quickly with no risks. But to achieve this he needed the presence and the countenance of another wealthy nobleman of the African province, who, like him when he purchased me, had never been in Rome or, indeed, out of the colony. The name of this man, whom I had met while in Thysdrus, was Salsonius Salinator. His wealth, inherited by his father and grandfather from a long line of wealthy ancestors, came from

many vast salt works along the coast, which, by the custom of the province, remained private property and merely paid the government a lease-tax or rent. The family had been, many generations before, named from these works and was very proud of its names.

Now Falco had so far progressed with his negotiations that the other parties to the proposed bargain were unwilling to close the deal and sign a contract with Falco and his associates unless Salsonius Salinator, in person, appeared to make some necessary statements, and were willing and eager to sign and seal the projected agreement if he did appear in person and did make those required statements. I am averse to smirching Falco's memory by going more minutely into detail.

Now Salinator had written Falco that he was coming to Rome and later, when he received a letter from Falco outlining the pending negotiations and their object, he had written promising to be in Rome by a specified date. He was most enthusiastic as to Falco's project and thought as well of it as did Falco. Falco told his associates of Salinator's letter and promise and they adjusted their outstanding investments so as to be able to close the contract as soon as Salinator appeared.

He did not appear on the date specified. Naturally Falco was perturbed, his associates vexed and the men with whom they were dealing increasingly restive. They threatened to break off the negotiations and close a contract with other bidders. Falco begged for an extension of the time and they grudgingly granted it. Still no signs of or word from Salinator. The negotiations appeared likely to fall through.

In his distress Falco conceived and set about putting into practice a scheme such as he would never have thought of or entertained if he had been the man he was when he bought me. When he was himself he had been the reverse of dishonorable. He came to me and said:

"We are at the end of our tether, Pullanius and his gang will break off negotiations tomorrow if I can't get hold of Salinator. I have no hope of his arrival, he may have not yet

sailed from Carthage; he may have changed his mind about coming at all. I am not willing to lose so brilliant a chance. I have thought of just what to do.

"You would look like a Roman if you had your beard trimmed and your hair cut and all that powder and paint and rouge washed off your face: I took you for a full-blooded Roman when I first set eyes on you. What is more you would look so utterly unlike what you look like in your fantastic fripperies that no one would even suspect you of being the same man. Anyhow, Pullanius and his crowd have never set eyes on you, not one of them.

"All you have to do is to have your beard cut to about the fashionable length and your hair trimmed to conform similarly with current fashions for Roman noblemen and get into full-dress shoes, a nobleman's tunic and toga, and you'll pass anywhere for a genuine, free-born, full-blooded Roman.

"I'll take you to Pullanius tomorrow and introduce you as Salsonius Salinator. I'll coach you carefully as to how to behave and what to say. You are clever enough to assume the natural Roman demeanor to a nicety: also to rise to any unexpected situations and act and talk precisely as would Salinator himself.

"It will be sharp practice, in a sense. But I know Salinator would say all I want him to say, all Pullanius requires him to say, and more, if he were actually here. He is as keen on closing this contract as I am. So I am not asking you to be a party to an actual fraud. You will only be bringing about what would come about without you if something unforeseen had not prevented Salinator from getting here in time."

Now I had often differed with Falco, argued with him, opposed him, refused requests of his, and he had acquiesced and had acted as if I were not his property, but a free man and his complete social equal. But this was a situation wholly different from any I had encountered before. When it came to gem-collecting or to anything which gave him or would give him or was expected to yield him surplus cash for buying more gems for his collection, Falco was a monomaniac.

I dared not refuse, or oppose him or argue or show any hesitation. A master can change in a twinkling from an indulgent friend to an infuriated despot. In spite of the laws passed by Hadrian and his successors limiting the authority of masters over their slaves and giving slaves certain rights before magistrates, in practice an angry master can go to any length to coerce a recalcitrant slave. I saw not only privations, discomforts, hunger, confinement and chains threatening me, but scourging and torture.

I acquiesced.

Now I am not going into any details as to what I did and said to induce Pullanius and his associates to execute the desired contract. I acted the part of Salinator to perfection and my imposture succeeded completely.

But the negotiations dragged, for all that, and I had to impersonate Salsonius Salinator not only before Pullanius and his partners but generally all over Rome: had to submit to being shown the sights in my character of a provincial magnate in Rome for the first time; had to allow myself to be dragged to morning receptions of senators and wealthy noblemen and introduced to them; had to accept invitations to dinners given by noblemen and senators; even had to attend a public morning reception in the Audience Hall of the Palace. That I escaped undetected was more than miraculous; I could not believe it myself. But I did escape.

I escaped unsuspected the ordeal of being haled to a morning reception of Vedius Vedianus and presented to him as Salsonius Salinator of Carthage, Nepte and Putea. I should have been lost had he had at his elbow to jog his memory if he forgot a visitor's name the slave he had had in that capacity seven years before, since that alert *nomenclator* would have recognized me at once. But he had died of the plague and his successor had never set eyes on me. Vedius himself would certainly have known me for my true self but for his inveterate selfishness, and self-absorption and his incapacity for being diverted from whatever thought or idea happened to be uppermost in his narrow mind. He was, for some reason, eager to be done with his reception and had no eyes

for any visitors except those from whom he expected immediate and positive advantage to himself. I escaped, but I went out sweating and limp with excitement.

I was even more faint and weak after having to attend a Palace levee. Fortunately Commodus had wearied of his father's methods of holding receptions and had reverted to the regulations in vogue under Trajan and Hadrian, according to which only such senators as were summoned approached the throne and were personally greeted by the Prince; the rest of the senators and all the lesser noblemen merely passed before the Emperor as he stood in front of the throne, passing four abreast along the main pavement at the foot of the steps of the dais and saluting him as they passed. Amid this crush of mediocrities I passed unnoticed, unremarked, unscathed.

But I marvelled at my luck, for I knew many eyes of secret-service experts scanned that slow-moving column of togaed noblemen and such adepts have a marvellous memory for the shape of an ear, a nose, a chin, or any such feature. After my hair and beard had been trimmed to suit Falco's notions and my face was innocent of powder, rouge and paint and I was habited in a tunic and toga with stripes of the width belonging to Salinator's rank and dress-boots of the cut and color proper for him I conned my reflection in the mirror in my dressing-room and was certain that anyone who had known me as myself must recognize me at first glance.

My two worst ordeals came when I went out with Falco to my second and fourth formal dinner in Rome in my character of provincial magnate. I went with him, altogether, to eight different dinners at the houses of capitalists associated with or supposed to have influence with Pullanius. Not once, in any of these eight perilous expeditions, did it occur to Falco to inform me beforehand where I was to dine. And I thought it best not to ask him, since I reflected that his complete ignorance of my past was an important factor in my chances of continued concealment and safety; and

since I felt that some word, tone or look of mine might put him on the road to suspecting the truth about me. Therefore I set out to each of these eight dinners totally ignorant of our destination.

The first time I knew I was to dine with Appellasius Clavviger, a Syrian capitalist who had been in Rome not much longer than Falco himself. Judge of my feelings when, in the mellow light which bathes Rome just after the sun has set from a clear sky and before day has begun to fade, I perceived that my litter-bearers, following Falco's, were turning into the street where I had lived before my ruin! Imagine my sensations when we halted before the palatial dwelling which had been my uncle's abode and mine!

I was even more perturbed and overwhelmed by my emotions when on entering behind Falco I found nothing changed, scarcely anything altered from what had been there on the fatal morning on which, without any premonition of disaster, I had set off to the Palace levee and had, on my way, been saved by Vedia's intervention and letter. The appointments of the vestibule, of the porter's lodge, were as I had known them in my uncle's lifetime. So were the furnishings of the atrium and *tablinum*. Scarcely a statue had been added or so much as moved, most of the pictures being where my uncle had had them hung.

Appellasius, a fat, jovial, jolly man, did not see my confusion. We were the last guests to arrive and he was hungry. We passed at once into the *triclinium*. There also the wall-decorations were precisely as I had last seen them; but the square table and three square sofas had vanished and, in their place, was a new C-shaped sofa and a circular table covered with a magnificent embroidered cloth.

In the course of the dinner, the company, as was natural with vulgarians newly enriched, fell to talking of their residences, of their size, convenience, and cost. I took the opportunity to compliment Appellasius on his abode and, as he warmed to the subject, I inquired whether he had inherited it or bought it.

"Neither," said he. "I have merely leased it, and leased it furnished. It belongs to the *fiscus;* it was confiscated some years ago when its owner was proscribed for joining in one of the conspiracies against the Emperor. It is a pearl I am told that the father of its last owner was an art connoisseur. Anyhow I could not improve on its decoration or furnishings. I have made few changes, chiefly installing this up-to-date dining-outfit. The fittings of this room were all of one hundred years old, very fine in material and ornamentation, but unbearably inconvenient."

I had learned all I hoped for or dared attempt, and for the rest of the entertainment I kept to subjects as far as possible from anything likely to compromise me.

My second and far my severest ordeal was when a few evenings later I was dazed to realize that my litter, behind Falco's, was halting before the well-known residence of that booby, Faltonius Bambilio. But I was not afraid of him I rated him such a dolt, such an ass, that even if he exclaimed that I was the image of Andivius Hedulio I had no doubt I could convince him that I was what I pretended to be and could even expunge from his mind any recollections of his having noticed such a striking resemblance. In fact he did not make any remark on my appearance or seem to have any inkling that he had ever seen me before, but accepted me as an interesting stranger.

I dreaded what guests he might have and the actuality surpassed my capacities to forecast possibilities.

I found the middle sofa at his table, for he adhered to the old-fashioned furnishings for a *triclinium,* occupied by his wife, Nemestronia and Vedia!

Vedia, after one tense moment of incredulous numb staring, regained her composure.

Evidently she had not confided in anyone the fact of my survival and existence. For, if she had, she would have taken dear old Nemestronia into her confidence, since she was as able to keep a secret as any woman who ever lived and had loved me as if I had been her own and only grandson

For Nemestronia manifestly had believed me dead. At sight of me she was as thunderstruck as if she had seen an indubitable specter. She was smitten dumb and rigid and her discomposure was remarked by all present. But she recovered herself in time, passed off her agitation as having been due to one of her sudden attacks of pain in the chest. After that she did as much as Vedia to dispel any tendency to suspicions which she might have aroused. She was plainly, to my eyes, overjoyed at the sight of me in the flesh.

I have branded on my memory for life the picture I saw as I entered the *triclinium*. Its wall decorations expressed old Bambilio's enthusiasm for Alexandrian art and literature. The ceiling was adorned with a copy of Apellides' Dance of the Loves; and the walls were decorated with copies of equally celebrated paintings by masters of similar fame. The wall niches were filled with statues of the Alexandrian poets, the two opposite the entrance door with those of Euphorion and Philetas, the brilliant hues of the paint on them depicting garments as gaudy as I myself had been wearing a few days before. From the pink faces of the bedizened poets their jeweled eyes sparkled as if they were chuckling at the situation. Under the mellow light shed by the numerous hanging lamps, against the intricate particolored patterns of the wall between the statue-niches, I saw the vacuous baby face of Asellia, Bambilio's pretty doll of a wife, between Vedia's countenance cleverly assuming a normal social expression after her brief glare at me, and Nemestronia's mask of horror, accentuated by the agony of the gripping spasm which throttled her, for the pain in her chest was induced by anything which startled her, and was not assumed.

Once we were composed on the sofas the dinner passed off almost comfortably. For Nemestronia played her part in my behalf fully as well as did Vedia, who conversed with me easily, her demeanor precisely as if I had been Salsonius Salinator, a stranger whom she had just met, our talk mostly about Carthage, salt-works, the lagoons of the edge of the desert, date palms, local fruits, gazelles and such like topics,

Nemestronia seconding her with questions about temple libraries, the cult of Isis in Hippo, and such matters. I became almost gay, I was enjoying myself.

The enjoyment, toward the close of the banquet, was marred by Bambilio, who, inevitably, had told Falco of his capture by brigands on the Flaminian Highway and, after his tale was told at great length, insisted on Vedia telling hers.

Worst of all, when she came to her night in her travelling carriage, alone (as of course all supposed) and surrounded by escaped beasts, hyenas, leopards, panthers, tigers and lions, Bambilio must needs remark:

"I'll wager you wished that the ghost of your old lover, Hedulio, had come to your assistance. He could wrestle with leopards; perhaps even his ghost might be able to control wild beasts."

"Perhaps," Vedia rejoined, unruffled, "maybe he was there to help me and maybe that was why I never felt really afraid that any beast would burst into my coach and seize me, though several snuffed at its panels and I could see them plain in the clear moonlight. Perhaps, in spirit, he was close to me to keep off the ravenous beasts and to strengthen my heart."

After she also had ended her story Bambilio eyed me:

"Did you ever hear a story excel hers and mine, Salsonius?" he queried.

"Never," I admitted, my gaze full on his.

The booby showed not a gleam of suspicion!

Inwardly I could not but remark that whereas I despised and loathed Bambilio for his pomposity and self-esteem, he made and kept friends. Plainly both Nemestronia and Vedia liked him, esteemed him and respected him.

After we left, I felt positively exhilarated at having had an evening in Vedia's company and having talked with her. Her escort, fortunately for me, had not been Flavius Clemens but young Duillius Silanus, son of the consul, who had never met me before.

CHAPTER XXXIV

PALUS THE INCOMPARABLE

WITHIN a very few days after my encounter with Vedia at Bambilio's dinner Falco and I had just ascended the stair of his residence after returning from a conference with Pullanius and his partners at which both sides had finally agreed on terms to the last detail and the contracts had been drawn up, executed, signed and sealed. He said:

"Phorbas, I am pleased with you. Such imposture as I have enticed you into cannot have been palatable to a man of your character. You have manifestly disrelished it, but you have valiantly stomached it for my sake. Actually you may be comforted, for it has not really been dishonest or dishonorable; you have only acted and spoken vicariously for Salinator: to a certainty he would have done and said just what you have, had he been present in person.

"You are a wonderful actor. No Greek or part Greek or half Greek or quarter Greek or thirty-second Greek I ever knew or heard of, clever as Greeks are at histrionics, could so perfectly act a Roman noble in every detail of demeanor, manner and word: down to the most trifling expression of every prejudice inherent in a Roman born. I admire you.

"Also I thank you.

"And I am as relieved as you will be to be able to tell you that your masquerade is at an end, successful and unsuspected.

"Now the important thing is for Salsonius Salinator to vanish from Rome at once.

"I suppose you have the wigs and false-beards you said you would buy or have made?"

"They are in my dressing-room," I replied.

"Then," he continued, "have yourself waked early, have your valet paint you and powder you and rouge you and fit

you out with a wig like the head of hair you had before made you impersonate Salinator, and with a false beard n one will suspect; have him rig you up in your favorite attir and load you with jewelry, then set off in my travelling carriage for Baiæ. Be out of Rome by sunrise. Trave straight to Baiæ as rapidly as you find practicable withou fatiguing yourself. At Baiæ you will have the Villa an servants all to yourself. Stay there until you have grow your hair and beard as it was before your masquerade. The return to Rome as Phorbas."

He paused, gazed at me and added:

"And I mean to make a new will. Besides leaving yo your freedom and the legacy specified in my last will I mea to leave you my gem-collection and a full fourth of all m other estate. You deserve a lavish reward and I believe love you better than any living human being."

I thanked him with my best imitation of the manner of Greek, but with genuine feeling and from a full heart.

Actually I was glad to get out of Rome, glad to linger a Baiæ. I made my time as long as I could and resisted sev eral importunities from Falco before I finally returned t the city more than a year after I had left it. Thus I wa out of Rome during the great fire, which destroyed, alon with the Temple and Altar of Peace, the Temples of th Divine Julius and the Divine Augustus, the Temple of Vesta the Atrium of Vesta and most of the other buildings abou the great Forum, also the Porticus Margaritaria and the sho of Orontides. Strangely enough, when, at Baiæ, I rea letters from Falco, Tanno and Agathemer describing th devastation, my mind dwelt more on the annihilation of th shop where I had encountered Vedia than on the destructio of the Palace records and most of the public records, or o the many revered temples which had vanished in the flame

When I returned to Rome the ruins were already largel cleared, and rebuilding, especially of the Temple of Vesta was vigorously under way.

In Falco's household and manner of life I found fe changes, except that Falco, really in excellent health, ha

become concerned about his trifling ailments, and, after trying one and another physician, had enrolled himself among the patients of the most distinguished exponent of the healing arts. Galen therefore, was a frequent visitor at my home and I saw him not infrequently. When I had some minor discomfort, Falco, always pampering me, called Galen in and enrolled me also among his charges.

After my return to the City the chief topic of conversation among persons of all grades of society and the pivot, so to speak, on which the spectacles of the amphitheater revolved was Palus the Gladiator.

I may set down here that I, personally, am now, as I was when I saw him appear as a charioteer for the last time, certain that Palus was Commodus in person. And I set this down as a fact. It will be seen later that I had more opportunity than any man in Rome, outside of the Palace, to know the facts.

Many people then believed and not a few still maintain that Palus was merely a crony of Commodus. Some whispered that he was a half-brother of Commodus, a son of Faustina and a favorite gladiator, brought up by the connivance of her too-indulgent husband; which wild tale suits neither with Faustina's actual deportment, as contrasted with the lies told of her by her detractors, nor with the character of Aurelius. Others even hinted that Palus was a half-brother of Commodus on the other side, off-spring of Aurelius and a concubine. This invention consorts still worse with the nature of Aurelius, who was one of the most uxorious of men and by nature monogamic and austere, almost ascetic. Some contented themselves with conjecturing that Palus accidentally resembled Commodus, which was not so far from the truth.

For I knew Ducconius Furfur from our boyhood and I solemnly assert that Palus was Commodus and that, whenever Palus appeared in the circus and, later, in the amphitheater, while the Imperial Pavilion was filled by the Imperial retinue, with the throne occupied apparently by the Emperor, the throne was occupied by a dummy emperor, Ducconius

Furfur, in the Imperial attire, and Commodus was in the arena as Palus. Anyone who chooses may, from this pronouncement, set me down as a credulous ninny, if it suits his notions.

When Palus drove a chariot in the circus he never appeared with his face fully exposed, but invariably wore over its upper portion the half-mask of gauze, which is designed to protect a charioteer's eyes from dust and flying grains of sand. Similarly, when Palus entered the arena as a gladiator he never fought in any of those equipments in which gladiators appear bareheaded or with faces exposed: as a *retiarius,* for instance. He always fought as a *secutor* or *murmillo,* or in the armor proper to a Samnite, Thracian, or heavy-armed Greek or Gaul; all of which equipments include a heavy helmet with a vizor. Palus always fought with his vizor down.

It seems to me that the plain inference from these facts corroborates my opinions concerning Palus: certainly it strengthens my belief in my views. And these facts were and are known to be facts by all who, as spectators in the circus or in the amphitheater, beheld Palus as charioteer or as gladiator.

As a gladiator he was more than marvellous, he was miraculous. I was present at all his public appearances from the time of my return from Baiæ. Also I had seen him closer, from the senatorial boxes in the amphitheater, three several times during my impersonation of Salsonius Salinator. Moreover I had seen him as a gladiator not a few times before that, since Falco, soon after we came to Rome from Africa, because of his affection for me and his tendency to indulge me in every imaginable way and to arrange for me every conceivable pleasure, had contrived to use the influence of some new-found friends to make possible my presence at shows in the Colosseum, and that in as good a seat as was accessible to any free-born Roman not a noble or senator.

The very first time I saw Palus in the arena I felt sure he was Commodus in person, for he had to a marvel every one of his characteristics of height, build, outline, agility,

grace, quickness and deftness and all his tricks of attitude and movement. The two were too identical to be anything except the very same man.

It will occur to any reader of these memoirs that Palus was a left-handed fighter, and that Commodus not only fought left-handed, but wrote, by preference, with his left hand and with it more easily, rapidly and legibly than with his right. But I do not lay much stress on this for about one gladiator in fifty fights left-handed, so that the fact that Palus was left-handed, while it accords with my views, does not, in my opinion, help to prove them.

What, to my mind, much more tends to confirm my views, is the well-known fact that Palus was always equipped with armor and weapons more magnificent and more expensive than any ever seen on other gladiators. Everything he used or wore was of gold or heavily gilt; even his spear heads and sword blades were brilliantly gilded; so were his helmets, shields, bucklers, corselets, breastplates, the scales of his kilt-straps when he fought as a Greek, and his greaves, whether of Greek pattern or of some other fashion. If he appeared in an armament calling for arm-rings, leg-rings, or leg-wrappings, these were always also heavily gilt. So was his footgear, whether he wore thigh-boots, full-boots, half-boots, soldiers' brogues, half-sandals or sandals. His shoulder-guards (called "wigs" in the slang of the prize-ring) were, apparently, of pure cloth of gold, which also appeared to be the material of his aprons when his accoutrements did not include a kilt.

Now it may be said that this merely indicates that his equipment was the most extravagant instance of the manner in which opulent enthusiasts lavished their cash on the outfitting of their favorites in the arena. To me it seems too prodigal for the profusion of any or all of such spendthrifts: it appears to me more like the self-indulgence of the vainglorious master of the world. Palus often wore a helmet so bejeweled that its cost would have overtaxed the wealth of Didius Julianus.

I consider that my opinions are corroborated by the well-

known fact that whenever Palus appeared as a gladiator in the amphitheater, Galen was present in the arena as chief of the surgeons always at hand to dress the wounds of victors or of vanquished men who had won the approbation or favor of the spectators or of the Imperial party. True, Galen was often there when Palus was not in the arena, for he was always on the watch for anatomical knowledge to be had from observation of dying men badly wounded. But, on the other hand, while he was often in the arena when Palus was not there, he was never absent when Palus was fighting.

Similarly, after Aemilius Lætus was appointed Prefect of the Palace, he was always present in person in the arena whenever Palus appeared in it. This, too, makes for my contentions.

The first fight in which I saw Palus revealed to me, and brought home to me with great force, the reason for his nickname, its origin and its astonishing appropriateness. The word *"palus"* has a number of very different meanings: manifestly its fitness as a pet name for the most perfect swordsman ever seen in any arena came from its use to denote the paling of a palisade, or any stake or post. Palus, in a fight, always appeared to stand still: metaphorically he might be said to seem as immobile as the post upon which beginners in the gladiatorial art practice their first attempts at strokes, cuts, thrusts and lunges. So little did he impress beholders as mobile, so emphatically did he impress them as stationary, that he might almost as well have been an upright stake, planted permanently deep in the sand.

I first saw him fight as a *secutor*, matched against a *retiarius*. This kind of combat is, surely, the most popular of all the many varieties of gladiatorial fights; and justly, for such fights are by far the most exciting to watch and their incidents perpetually varied, novel and unpredictable. It is exciting because the *retiarius*, nude except for one small shoulder-guard and a scanty apron, appears to have no chance whatever against the *secutor* with his big vizored helmet, his complete body-armor, his kilt of lapped leather straps plated with polished metal scales, his greaves or leg-rings

or boots and his full-length, curved shield and Spanish sword. The *secutor*, always the bigger man and fully armed and armored, appears invincible against the little manikin of a *retiarius* skipping about bareheaded and almost naked and armed only with his trident, a fisherman's three-tined spear, with a light handle and short prongs, his little dagger and his cord net, which, when spread, is indeed large enough to entangle any man, but which he carries crumpled up to an inconspicuous bunch of rope no bigger than his head.

Yet the fact is the reverse of the appearance. No one not reckless or drunk ever bet even money on an ordinary *secutor*. The odds on the *retiarius* are customarily between five to three and two to one. And most *secutors* manifestly feel their disadvantage. As the two men face each other and the *lanista* gives the signal anyone can see, usually, that the *retiarius* is confident of victory and the *secutor* wary and cautious or even afraid. Dreading the certain cast of the almost unescapable net, the *secutor* keeps always on the move, and continually alters the direction and speed and manner of his movement, taking one short step and two long, then three short and one long, breaking into a dog-trot, slowing to a snail's-pace, leaping, twisting, curving, zigzagging, ducking and in every way attempting to make it impossible for the *retiarius* to foretell from the movement he watches what the next movement will be.

Palus behaved unlike any other *secutor* ever seen in the arena. He availed himself of none of the usual devices, which *lanistæ* taught with such care, in the invention of which they gloried and in which they drilled their pupils unceasingly. He merely stood still and watched his adversary. The cunning cast of the deadly net he avoided by a very slight movement of his head or body or both. No *retiarius* ever netted him, yet the net seldom missed him more than half a hand's breadth. When the disappointed *retiarius* skipped back to the length of his net-cord and retrieved his net by means of it, Palus let him gather it up, never dashed at him, but merely stepped sedately towards him. If the *retiarius* ran away, Palus followed, but never

in haste, always at a slow, even walk. No matter how often his adversary cast his net at him, Palus never altered his demeanor. The upshot was always the same. The spectators began to jeer at the baffled *retiarius,* he became flustered, he ventured a bit too near his immobile opponent, Palus made an almost imperceptible movement and the *retiarius* fell, mortally wounded.

I was never close enough to Palus to see clearly the details of his lunges, thrusts and strokes. I saw him best when I was a spectator in the Colosseum while impersonating Salsonius Salinator, for in my guise as colonial magnate I sat well forward. Even then I was not close enough to him to descry the finer points of his incomparable swordsmanship. Yet what I saw makes me regard as fairly adequate the current praises of him emanating from those wealthy enthusiasts who were reckoned the best judges of such matters. By the reports I heard they said that Palus never cut a throat, he merely nicked it, but the tiny nick invariably and accurately severed the carotid artery, jugular vein or windpipe.

I can testify, from my own observation, to his having displayed comparable skill in an equally effective stab in a different part of his adversary's body. As is well known, a deep slash of the midthigh, inside, causes death nearly as quickly as a cut throat; if the femoral artery is divided the blood pours out of the victim almost as from an inverted pail, a horrible cascade. Most of the acclaimed gladiators use often this deadly stroke against the inside midthigh, slashing it to the bone, leaving a long, deep, gaping wound. Palus never slashed an adversary's thigh; in killing by a thigh wound he always delivered a lunge which left a small puncture, but invariably also left the femoral artery completely severed, so that the life-blood gushed out in a jet astonishingly violent, the victim collapsing and dying very quickly. Such a parade requires altogether transcendant powers of accuracy from eye and hand.

Besides fighting as a *secutor* against a *retiarius* Palus in the same accoutrements fought with men similarly equipped,

or accoutred as Greeks, Gauls, Thracians, Samnites, or *murmillos;* also he appeared in the equipment of each of these sorts of gladiators against antagonists equipped like himself or in any of the other fashions.

In all these countless fights he was never once wounded by any adversary nor did he ever deliver a second stroke, thrust or lunge against any: his defence was always impregnable, his attack always unerring; when he lunged his lunge never missed and was always fatal, unless he purposely spared a gallant foe.

Besides the exhibitions of bravado and self-confidence traditional with gladiators, all of which he displayed again and again, Palus devised more than one wholly original with himself.

For instance, he would take his stand in the arena equipped as a *secutor,* the *lanista* would have in charge not one *retiarius,* but ten, or even a dozen. One would attack Palus and when, after a longer or shorter contest, he was killed, the *lanista* would, without any respite, allow a second to rush at Palus; then a third; and so on till everyone had perished by the *secutor's* unerring sword. No other *secutor* ever killed more than one *retiarius* without a good rest between the first fight and the second. Palus, as was and is well known, killed more than a thousand adversaries, of whom more than three hundred wore the accoutrements of a *retiarius.*

Palus was even more spectacular as a *dimachærus,* so called from having two sabers, for a *dimachærus* is a gladiator accoutred as a Thracian, but without any shield and carrying a naked saber in each hand. Such a fighter is customarily matched against an adversary in ordinary Thracian equipment. He has to essay the unnatural feat of guarding himself with one sword while attacking with the other. Such a feat is akin to those of jugglers and acrobats, for a sword is essentially an instrument of assault and cannot, by its very nature, take the place of a shield as a protection. Everybody, of course, knows that showy and startling ruse said to have been invented by the Divine Julius, which consists

in surprising one's antagonist by parrying a stroke with the sword instead of with the shield and simultaneously using the shield as a weapon, striking its upper rim against the adversary's chin. But this can succeed only against an opponent dull-witted, unwary, clumsy and slow, and then as a surprise. A *dimachærus* has to depend on parrying and his antagonist knows what to expect.

Palus was the most perfect *dimachærus* ever seen in the Colosseum. Without a shield he fought and killed many Thracians, Greeks, Gauls, *murmillos,* Samnites and *secutors.* He even, many times, fought two Thracians at once, killing both and coming off unscathed. I saw two of these exhibitions of insane self-confidence and I must say that Palus made good his reliance on his incredible skill. He pivoted about between his adversaries, giving them, apparently, every chance to attack simultaneously, distract him and kill him. Yet he so managed that, even if their thrusts appeared simultaneous, there was between them an interval, brief as a heart-beat, but long enough for him to dispose of one and turn on the other, or escape one and pierce the other. I could not credit my own eyes. With my belief as to the identity of Palus I marvelled that a man whose life was dominated by the dread of assassination, who feared poison in his wine and food, who hedged himself about with guards and then feared the guards themselves, who distrusted everybody, who dreaded every outing, who was uneasy even inside his Palace, felt perfectly at ease and serenely safe in the arena with no defence but two sabers, and he between two hulking ruffians, as fond of life as any men, and knowing that they must kill him or be killed by him. In this deadly game he felt no qualms, only certitude of easy victory.

The controversies over the identity of Palus have produced a whole literature of pamphlets, some maintaining that he was Commodus, others professing to prove that he was not, of which some rehearse every possible theory of his relationship to Aurelius or Faustina. Among these the most amazing are those which set forth the view that Palus was Commodus, but no skillful swordsman, rather a brazen sham.

killing ingloriously helpless adversaries who could oppose to his edged steel only swords of lath or lead.

This absurdity is in conflict with all the facts. Manifestly the antagonists of Palus were as well armed as he, both for defence and attack.

And, what is much more, the populace clamored for Palus, booed and cat-called if Palus did not appear in the arena; cheered him to the echo when he did appear; yelled with delight and appreciation at each exhibition of his prophetic intuition as to what his adversary was about to do, of his preternaturally perfect judgment as to what to do himself, of the instantaneous execution of whatever movement he purposed, of its complete success; and applauded him while he went off as no other gladiator ever was applauded. It was the popular demand for him which made possible and justified the unexampled fee paid Palus for each of his appearances in the arena. The managers of the games were obliged to include Palus in each exhibition or risk a riot of the indignant populace.

Now no sham fighter could fool the Roman populace. A make-believe swordsman, such as the pamphlets which I have cited allege Commodus to have been, might, if Emperor, have overawed the senators and nobles of equestrian rank and compelled their unwilling applause of sham feats. But no man, not even an Emperor, could coerce the Roman proletariat into applauding a fighter unworthy of applause. Our populace, once seated to view a show of any kind, cannot be controlled, cannot even be swayed. No fame of any charioteer, beast-fighter or gladiator can win from them tolerance of the smallest error of judgment, defect of action, attempt at foul play or hint of fear: they boo anything of which they disapprove and not Jupiter himself could elicit from them applause of anything except exhibitions of courage, skill, artistry and quickness fine enough to rouse their admiration. They admired Palus, they adored him.

This is well known to all men and proves Palus a consummate artist as a gladiator. Not only would the populace howl a bungler or coward off the sand, they know every

shade of excellence; only a superlatively perfect swordsman could kindle their enthusiasm and keep it at white heat year after year as did Palus.

Palus, I may remark, was always a gallant fighter, and a combination of skill and gallantry in an adversary so won his goodwill that he never killed or seriously wounded such an opponent. If his antagonist had an unusually perfect guard and a notably dangerous attack, was handsome, moved gracefully, displayed courage and fought with impeccable fairness Palus felt a liking for him, showed it by the way in which he stood on the defensive and mitigated the deadliness of his attacks, played him longer than usual to demonstrate to all the spectators the qualities he discerned in him, and, when he was convinced that the onlookers felt as he felt, disabled his admired match with some effective but trifling wound.

Then, when his victim collapsed, Palus would leap back from him, sheath his sword, and saw the air with his empty left hand, fingers extended and pressed together, thumb flat against the crack between the roots of the index finger and big finger, twisting his hand about and varying the angle at which he sawed the air, so that all might see that he wished his fallen adversary spared and was suggesting that the spectators nearest him imitate his gesture and give the signal for mercy by extending their arms thumbs flat to fingers.

Except Murmex Lucro I never saw any other gladiator presume to suggest to the spectators which signal he would like them to display; and Murmex had the air of a man taking a liberty with his betters and not very sure whether they would condone his presumption or resent his insolence; whereas Palus waved his arm much as Commodus raised his from the Imperial throne when, as Editor of the games, he decided the fate of a fallen gladiator concerning whom the populace were so evenly divided between disfavorers and favorers that neither the victor nor his *lanista* dared to interpret so doubtful a mandate.

The most amazing fact concerning Palus was that hi

audiences never wearied of watching him fence. It is notorious that the spectators in the Colosseum always have been and are, in general, impatient of any noticeable prolongation of a fight. Only a very small minority of the populace and a larger, but still small, minority of the gentry and nobility, take delight in the fine points of swordsmanship for themselves. Most spectators, while acclaiming skilled fence and expecting it, look upon it merely as a means for adding interest to the preliminaries of what they desire to behold. Even senators and nobles admit that the pleasure of viewing gladiatorial shows comes from seeing men killed. Contests are thrilling chiefly because of their suggestion of the approach of the moment which brings the supreme thrill.

The populace, quite frankly, rate the fighting as a bore; they do not come to watch skilled swordsmen fence; they want to see two men face each other and one kill the other at once. It is the killing which they enjoy. The upper tiers of spectators in the amphitheater seldom give the signal for mercy when a defeated man is down and helpless, even though he be handsome and graceful and has fought bravely, skillfully and gallantly. One seldom sees an outstretched arm, with the hand extended, fingers close together and thumb flat against them, raised anywhere from the back seats; their occupants habitually, in such cases, wave their upraised arms with the hands clenched and thumbs extended, waggling their thumbs by half rotating their wrists, to make the thumb more conspicuous, yelling the while, so that the amphitheater is full of their insistent roar and the upper tiers aflash with flickering thumbs. They weigh no fine points as to the worth of the vanquished man, they do not value a good fighter enough to want him saved to fight again, they come to see men die and they want the defeated man slaughtered at once.

They are habituated to acquiescing if the Emperor—or the Editor, if the Prince is not present—or the nobility contravene their wishes and give the signal for mercy when a gallant fighter is down by accident, misadventure or because he was outmatched. But there is often a burst of howls if

the signal for mercy comes not from the Imperial Pavilion or the whole *podium,* but merely from some part of the nobility or senators. Generally, if the Emperor has not given or participated in the signal for mercy, scattered individuals among the proletariat proclaim their disappointment by booings, cat-calls, or strident whistlings.

Now Palus was so popular, so beloved by the slum-dwellers, that whenever he showed a disposition to spare an opponent, the whole mass of the populace were quick with the mercy-signal: the moment they saw Palus sheathe his blade their arms went up with his, almost before his, thumbs as flat as his, never a thumb out nor any fingers clenched.

More than this, no spectator, while Palus played an adversary, ever yelled for a prompt finish to the bout, as almost always happened at the first sign of delay in the case of any other fighter. So comprehensible, so unmistakable, so manifest, so fascinating were the fine points of the swordsmanship displayed by Palus that even the rearmost spectator, even the most brutish lout could and did relish them and enjoy them and crave the continuance of that pleasure.

Most of all the Colosseum audiences not only insisted on Palus appearing in each exhibition, not only longed for his entrance, not merely came to regard all the previous fights of the day as unwelcome postponements of the pleasure of watching Palus fence, but were manifestly impatient for the crowning delight of each day, the ecstacy of beholding a bout between Palus and Murmex Lucro, which contests were always bloodless.

CHAPTER XXXV

MURMEX

CUSTOMARILY, while Palus flourished, each day began with beast-fights, the noon pause was filled in by exhibitions of athletes, acrobats, jugglers, trained animals and such like, and the surprise; then the gladiatorial shows lasted

from early afternoon till an hour before sunset. Palus and Murmex appeared about mid-afternoon and were matched against the victors in the earlier fights. Each located himself at one focus of the ellipse of the arena, at which points two simultaneous fights were best seen by the entire audience. There they began each fight, not simultaneously, but alternately, till all their antagonists were disposed of, most killed and some spared. The spectators seldom hurried Murmex to end a fight; they never hurried Palus. His longest delay in finishing with an adversary, even his manifest intention to exhaust an opponent rather than to wound him, never elicited any protest from any onlooker. All, breathless, fascinated, craned to watch the perfection of his method, every movement of his body, all eyes intent on the point of his matchless blade.

Last of the day's exhibitions came the fencing match between Palus and Murmex, at the center of the arena, empty save for those two and their two *lanistæ*. All others in the arena, including the surgeons, their helpers and the guards, drew off to positions close under the *podium* wall.

Murmex and Palus fenced in all sorts of outfits, except that neither ever fought as a *retiarius*. Mostly both were equipped as *secutors*, but they fought also as *murmillos*, Greeks, Gauls, Thracians, Samnites and *dimachæri*, or one in any of these equipments against the other in any other.

Sometimes they delighted the populace by donning padded suits liberally whitened with flour or white clay, their *murmillos'* helmets similarly whitened, and then attacking each other with quarter-staffs of ash, cornel-wood or holly. A hit, of course, showed plainly on the whitened suits. As neither could injure the other in this sort of fight, and as they were willing to humor the populace, each was careless about his guard and reckless in his attack. Even so hits were infrequent, since each, even when most lax, had an instinctive guard superior to that of the most expert and cautious fencer among all other contemporary fighters. Even when, very occasionally, if Palus happened to be in a rollicking mood, each substituted a second quarter-staff for his

shield and, as it were, travestied a *dimachærus*, as what might be called a two-staff-man or a double-staff-man, hits were still not frequent. Each had a marvellously impregnable defence and they were very evenly matched in the use of the quarter-staff in place of a shield as they were in everything else. Palus fought better with his left hand attacking and his right defending, Murmex better the other way, but each was genuinely ambidextrous and used either hand at will, shifting at pleasure. When, amid the flash of their staffs, either scored, the hit brought a roar of delight from the upper tiers, even from the front rows, for the most dignified senators caught the infection of the general enthusiasm and so far forgot themselves as to yell like street urchins in their ecstasy.

Except in this farcical sort of burlesque fight neither ever scored a hit on the other, in all the years throughout which their combats finished each day of every gladiatorial exhibition. Yet the audience never tired of their bloodless bouts and, while the nobility and gentry never joined in, the populace invariably roared a protest if they saw the *lanistæ* make a move to separate them, and yelled for them to go on and fence longer.

The interest of the populace was caused by the fact, manifest and plain to all, that, while Murmex and Palus loved each other and had no intention of hurting each other, their matches had no appearance whatever of being sham fights. From the first parade until they separated every stroke, feint, lunge and thrust appeared to be in deadly, venomous earnest and each unhurt merely because, mortal as was his adversary's attack, his guard was perfect.

It seemed, in fact, as if each man felt so completely safe, felt so certain that his guard would never fail him, and at the same time felt so sure that his crony's guard was equally faultless, that there was no danger of his injuring his chum, that each attacked the other precisely as he attacked any other adversary. It was commonly declared among expert swordsmen and connoisseurs of sword-play, as among recent spectators, when talking over the features of an exhibition

after it was over, that practically every thrust, lunge or stroke of either in these bouts would have killed or disabled any other adversary; certainly it appeared so to me every time I saw them fence and especially while watching their bouts after I returned from my year at Baiæ, for after that I never missed a gladiatorial exhibition in the Colosseum. To my mind Palus and Murmex were manifestly playing with each other, like fox-cubs or Molossian puppies or wolf-cubs; yet the sport so much resembled actual attack and defence, as with nearly grown wolf-cubs, that it gave less the impression of play between friends than that of deadly combat between envenomed foes. Many a time I have heard or overheard some expert or connoisseur or enthusiast or provincial visitor, prophesy somewhat in this fashion:

"Some day one of those two is going to kill the other unexpectedly and unintentionally and by mistake. Each thinks the other will never land on him; each thinks the other has a guard so impregnable that it will never be pierced; each uses on the other attacks so unexpected, so sudden, so subtle, so swift, so powerful, so sustained, so varied that no third man alive could escape any one of them. It is almost a certainty that that sort of thing cannot go on forever. One or the other of them may age sufficiently to retire from the arena, as did Murmex Frugi, safe and unscarred, as he was not. But it is far more likely, since both are full of vitality and vigor, that neither will notice the very gradual approach of age, so that they will go on fighting with eyes undimmed, muscles supple and minds quick, yet not so quick, supple and keen as now: but the preternatural powers of one will wane a bit sooner than those of the other. And sooner or later one will err in his guard and be wounded or killed."

Most spectators agreed with such forecasts. What is more, most of the spectators admitted that, as they watched, each attack seemed certain to succeed; every time either man guarded it seemed as if he must fail to protect himself.

This, I think, explains the unflagging zest with which the entire audience, senators, nobles and commonality, watched their bouts, revelled in them, gloated over the memory of

them and longed for more and more. Consciously or unconsciously, every onlooker felt that sometime, some bout would end in the wounding, disabling or death of one of the two. And so perfect was their sword-play, so unfeigned their unmitigated fury of attack, so genuine the impeccable dexterity of their defence that every spectator felt that the supreme thrill, even while so long postponed, was certain to arrive. More, each felt, against his judgment, that it was likely to arrive the next moment. It was this illogical but unescapable sensation which kept the interest of the whole audience, of the whole of every audience, at a white heat over the bouts of Murmex and Palus. I myself experienced this condition of mind and became infected with the common ardor. I found myself rehearsing to myself the incidents of their last-seen bout, anticipating the next, longing for it: though I never had rated myself as ardent over gladiatorial games, but rather as lukewarm towards them, and considered myself much more interested in paintings, statuary, reliefs, ornaments, bric-a-brac, furniture, fine fabrics and all artistries and artisanries. Yet I confessed to myself that, from the time I saw first a bout between them, anticipation of seeing them fence, or enjoyment of it, came very high among my interests and my pleasures.

To some extent, I think, the long and unequaled vogue of their popularity was due to the great variety of their methods and almost complete absence of monotony in their bouts.

Palus was left-handed, but for something like every third bout or a third of each bout he fought right-handed, merely for bravado, as if to advertise that he could do almost as well with the hand less convenient. Murmex was right-handed, but he too fought often left-handed, perhaps one-fifth of the time. So, in whatever equipment, one saw each of them fight both ways. Therefore as *murmillos* they fought both right-handed, both left-handed, and each right-handed against the other fighting left-handed. This gave a perpetually shifting effect of novelty, surprise and interest to every bout between them. They similarly had four ways

of appearing as Greeks, Gauls, Samnites, Thracians, *secutors* or *dimachæri*.

Their bouts as *dimachæri* were breathlessly exciting, for it was impossible, from moment to moment, to forecast with which saber either would attack, with which he would guard; and, not infrequently, one attacked and the other guarded with both. When they fought in this fashion Galen, it always appeared to me, looked uneasy, keyed up and apprehensive. Yet neither ever so much as nicked, flicked or scratched the other in their more than sixty bouts with two sabers apiece.

More than a dozen times they appeared as Achilles and Hector, with the old-fashioned, full-length, man-protecting shield, the short Argive sword and the heavy lance, half-pike, half-javelin, of Trojan tradition. Murmex threw a lance almost as far and true as Palus and the emotion of the audience was unmistakably akin to horror when both, simultaneously, hurled their deadly spears so swiftly and so true that it seemed as if neither could avoid the flying death. Palus, true to his nickname, never visibly dodged, though Murmex's aim was as accurate as his own; he escaped the glittering, needle-pointed, razor-edged spear-head by half a hand's-breath or less by an almost imperceptible inclination of his body, made at the last possible instant, when it seemed as if the lance had already pierced him. It was indescribably thrilling to behold this.

Besides fencing equipped as Gauls, Samnites, Thracians and *secutors* they appeared in every combination of any of these and of Greeks and *murmillos* with every other. Palus as a *dimachærus* against Murmex as a *murmillo* made a particularly delectable kind of bout. Almost as much so Murmex as a Gaul against Palus as a Thracian. And so without end.

After my return from Baiæ Falco pampered me more than ever and, in particular, arranged to take me with him to all amphitheater shows and have me sit beside him in the front row of the nobles immediately behind the boxes of the senators on the *podium*. This does not sound possible in our

later days, when amphitheater regulations are strictly enforced, as they had been under the Divine Aurelius and his predecessors. But, while Commodus was Prince much laxity was rife in all branches of the government. After the orgies of bribe-taking, favoritism and such like in the heyday of Perennis and of Cleander, all classes of our society became habituated to ignoring contraventions of rules. Under Perennis and later under Cleander not a few senators took with them into their boxes favorites who were not only not of senatorial rank, nor even nobles, but not Romans at all: foreign visitors, alien residents of Rome, freedmen or even slaves, and the other senators, as a class exquisitely sensitive to any invasion of their privileges by outsiders, winked at the practice partly because some of them participated in it, much more because they feared to suffer out-and-out ruin, if, by word or look, they incurred the disfavor of Perennis while he was all-powerful or, later, of the more omnipotent Cleander. When a senator saw another so violate propriety, privilege and law, he assumed that the acting Prefect of the Palace had been bribed and so dared not protest or whisper disapprobation.

Much more than the senators the nobles obtained secret license to ignore the rules, or ignored them without license, since, when so many violated the regulations, no one was conspicuous or likely to be brought to book. Falco, being vastly wealthy, probably bribed somebody, but I never knew: when I hinted a query he merely smiled and vowed that we were perfectly safe.

So I sat beside him through that unforgettable December day, at the end of which came the culmination of what I have been describing.

The day was perfect, clear, crisp, mild and windless. It was not cold enough to be chilling, but was cold enough to make completely comfortable a pipe-clayed ceremonial toga over the full daily garments of a noble or senator, so that the entire audience enjoyed the temperature and basked in the brilliant sunrays; for, so late in the year, as the warmth of the sun was sure to be welcome, the awning had not been spread. I, in my bizarre oriental attire, wore my thickest

garments and my fullest curled wig and felt neither too cold nor too warm.

I never saw the Colosseum so brilliant a spectacle. It was full to the upper colonnade under the awning-rope poles, not a seat vacant. Spectators were sitting on the steps all up and down every visible stair; two or even three rows on each side of each stair, leaving free only a narrow alley up the middle of each for the passage in or out of attendants or others. Spectators filled the openings of the entrance-stairs, all but jamming each. In each of the cross-aisles spectators stood or crouched against its back-wall, ducking their heads to avoid protests from the luckier spectators in the seats behind them. The upper colonnade was packed to its full capacity with standees.

The program was unusual, gladiatorial exhibitions from the beginning of the show; and nothing else. The morning was full of brisk fights between young men; provincials, foreigners and some Italians, volunteer enthusiasts. The noon pause was filled in by routine fights of old or aging gladiators nearly approaching the completion of their covenanted term of service. It ended with a novelty, the encounter of two tight-rope walkers on a taut rope stretched fully thirty feet in the air. It was proclaimed that they were rivals for the favor of a pretty freedwoman and that they had agreed on this contest as a settlement of their rivalry. Certainly the two, naked save for breech-clouts and each armed with a light lance in one hand and a thin-bladed Gallic sword in the other, neared each other with every sign of caution, enmity and courage. Their sparring for an opening lasted some time, but was breathlessly interesting. The victor kept his feet on the rope and pierced his rival, who fell and died from the spear-wound or the fall or both.

During the noon pause the Emperor had left his pavilion. When he returned I, from my nearby location, was certain that Commodus himself had presided all the morning, but that now Furfur was taking his place. Certainly Palus and Murmex entered the arena soon after the noon pause and gave an exhibition almost twice as long as usual, killing many

adversaries. Before the sun was half way down the sky, as Palus finished an opponent with one of his all but invisible punctures of the thigh-artery, the upper tiers first and then all ranks acclaimed this as the death of the twelve-hundredth antagonist who had perished by his unerring steel.

The daylight had not begun to dim when Murmex and Palus faced each other for the fencing bout which was to end the day. Each was equipped as a *secutor*, Murmex in silvered armor, Palus all in gold or gilded arms. Their swords were not regulation army swords, such a *secutors* normally carried, but long-bladed Gallic swords, the longest-bladed swords ever used by any gladiators.

They made a wonderful picture as the *lanistæ* placed them and stepped back: Murmex, burly, stocky, heavy of build, thick-set, massive, with vast girth of chest and bull-neck, his neatly-fitting plated gauntlet, huge on his big right hand, his big plated boots planted solidly on the sand, his polished helmet, the great expanse of his silvered shield, his silvered kilt-strap-scales and silvered greave-boots brilliant in the cool late light; opposite him Palus, tall, lithe, graceful, slim, agile, all in gleaming gold, helmet, corselet, shield, kilt, greave-boots and all. They shone like a composite jewel set in the arena as a cameo in the bezel of a ring. And the picture they made was framed in the hoop of spectators crowding the slopes of the amphitheater, all silent after the gusts of cheers which had acclaimed the two as they took their places.

If possible, their feints and assaults were more thrilling than ever, unexpected, sudden, swift, all but successful. As always neither capered or pranced, Murmex not built for such antics, Palus by nature steady on his feet. But, except that their feet moved cannily, every bit of the rest of either's body was in constant motion and moved swiftly. The gleam and flicker of thrust and parry were inexpressibly rapid. Even the upper tiers craned, breathless and fascinated; and we, further forward, were numb and quivering with excitement.

I have heard a hundred eye-witnesses describe what oc-

curred. There was close agreement with what I seemed to see as I watched.

Palus lunged just as Murmex made a brilliantly unpredictable shift of his position. The shift and lunge came so simultaneously that neither had, in his calculated, predetermined movement, time to alter his intention; Murmex, you might say, threw his throat at the spot at which Palus had aimed his lunge. The sword-point ripped his throat from beside the gullet to against the spine, all one side of it. He collapsed, the blood spouting.

Palus cast the dripping sword violently from him, the gleaming blade flying up into the air and falling far off on the sand. The big shield fell from his right arm. Both his hands caught his big helmet, lifted it and threw it behind him. On one knee he sank by Murmex and, with his left hand, strove to staunch the gushing blood.

Before Galen, before even the *lanistæ* could reach the two, Murmex died.

Palus staggered to his feet and put up his gory hand to his yellow curls, with a convincingly agonized gesture of grief and horror.

He uttered some words, I heard his voice, but not the words. Folk say he said:

"I have killed the only match I had on earth, the second-best fighter earth ever saw."

The audience, I among them, stared, awe-struck and fascinated, at Commodus laying a bloody hand on his own head; we shuddered: I saw many look back and forth from Palus in the arena to the figure on the Imperial throne.

The guards ran, the surgeons' helpers ran, even Galen ran, but Aemilius Lætus reached Palus first, and, between the dazed and stunned *lanistæ*, picked up the big golden helmet and replaced it on his head, hiding his features. The distance from the *podium* wall to the center of the arena is so great, the distance from any other part of the audience so much greater, that, while many of the spectators were astounded, suspicious or curious, not one could be certain that Palus was, beyond peradventure, the Prince of the

Republic in person. Palus stood there, alternately staring at his dead crony and talking to Lætus and Galen.

The heralds had run up with the guards. Lætus, without any pretense of consultation with the dummy Emperor on the throne, spoke to the heralds and each stalked off to one focus of the ellipse of the arena. Thence each bellowed for silence, their deep-toned, resonant, loud, practiced voices carrying to the upper colonnade everywhere. Silence, deep already since Murmex received his death-wound and broken only by whispers, deepened. The amphitheater became almost still. Into the stillness the heralds proclaimed that next day the funeral games of Murmex Lucro would be celebrated in the Colosseum where he had died; that all persons entitled to seats in the Colosseum were thereby enjoined to attend, unless too ill to leave their homes: that all should come without togas, but, in sign of mourning for Murmex, wearing over their garments full-length, all-enveloping raincloaks of undyed black wool and similarly colored umbrella hats; that any person failing to attend so habited would be severely punished; that the show would be worth seeing, for, in honor of the Manes of Murmex, to placate his ghost, no defeated fighter would be spared and all the victors of the morning would fight each other in the afternoon.

Surely the tenth day before the Kalends of January, in December of the nine hundred and forty-fourth year of the City,* the year in which Commodus was nominally consul for the seventh time, and Pertinax consul for the second time, saw the strangest audience ever assembled in the amphitheater of the Colosseum. I was there, seated, as on the day before, next my master, my gaudy Asiatic garments, like his garb of a noble of equestrian rank, hidden under a great raincoat and my face shaded by the broad brim of an umbrella hat.

The universal material conventional for mourners' attire is certainly appropriate and proper for mourning garb. For the undyed wool of black sheep, when spun and woven, results

* 191 A.D.

in a cloth dingy in the extreme. The wearing of garments made of it suits admirably with grief and gloom of spirit, deepens sadness, accentuates woe, almost produces melancholy. And the sight of it, when one is surrounded by persons so habited, conduces to dejection and depression. This equally was felt by the whole audience. Instead of being a space glaring in the sunlight shining on an expanse of white togas, the hollow of the amphitheater was a dingy area of brownish black under a lowering canopy of sullen cloud, for the sky was heavily overcast and threatened rain all day, though not a drop fell. The windless air was damp and penetratingly chilly, so that we almost shivered under our swathings. The discomfort of not being warm enough and the dispiriting effect of the grim sky and gloomy interior of the amphitheater was manifest in a sort of general impression of melancholy and apprehension.

Apprehension, or, certainly, uneasiness, pervaded the audience and, as it were, seemed to diffuse itself from the Imperial Pavilion, crowded, not, as usual, with jaunty figures in gaudy apparel, all crimson, blue, and green, picked out and set off by edgings of silver and gold, but with a solemn retinue, all hidden under dingy umbrella hats and swathed in rain-cloaks. To see the throne occupied by a human shape so obscured by its habiliments gave all beholders an uncanny feeling in which foreboding deepened into alarm. The appearance of the whole audience, still more of the Imperial retinue, was one to cause all beholders to interpret the garb of the spectators as ill-omened, almost as inviting disaster.

In the center of the arena was built up the pyre which was to consume all that was left of Murmex. It was constructed of thirty-foot logs, each tier laid across the one below it, the lower tiers of linden, willow, elm and other quick-burning woods, their interstices filled with fat pine-knots; the upper tiers of oak and maple, at which last I heard not a few whispered protests, for old-fashioned folk felt it almost a sacrilege that holy wood should be used to burn a gladiator, a man of blood. The pyre was thus a square struc-

ture thirty feet on a side and fully twenty feet high; each side showing silvered log-butts or log-ends, with gilded pine-knots all between; its top covered with laurel boughs, over which was laid a crimson rug with golden fringe, setting off the corpse of Murmex, which lay in the silver armor he had worn in his last fight, high on the mound of laurel boughs.

At each focus of the arena was placed a round marble altar, one to Venus Libitina, one to Pluto. By these the heralds took their stands and proclaimed that no offerings would be made at the altars except one black lamb at each, that every man slain in the day's fighting would be an offering to the Manes of Murmex, since the day would be occupied solely with the celebration of funeral games for the solace of his ghost.

The games began with a set-to of sixteen pairs of gladiators fighting simultaneously. After this was over the sixteen victors drew off towards one end of the arena and sixteen other pairs fought simultaneously. After them the victors of the first set paired off as the *lanistæ* arranged and the eight pairs fought. The eight victors again rested while the survivors of the second set simultaneously fought as eight pairs. So they alternated till only two men survived. A third batch of thirty-two gladiators then fought in sixteen pairs; then the two survivors of the first and second batches fought. The heralds proclaimed that the sole survivor of the first sixty-four would fight again in the afternoon. So with the sole survivor of the third and fourth batches. This grim butchery gave a savage tone to the whole day. All the morning many pairs fought, till one of each pair was killed. But, after the fourth batch, every victor in any fight was reserved to fight again in the afternoon.

To my eyesight the figure on the throne, even under that broad hat-brim and enveloped in that thick rain-cloak, was manifestly Commodus in person. Unmistakably his was every Imperial gesture as he presided as Editor of the games.

During the noon interval, as usual, the Emperor retired

to his robing-room under the upper tiers of the amphitheater. When again, after the noon interval, the throne was reoccupied, I felt certain that its occupant was Ducconius Furfur.

At any rate Palus appeared at once after the noon interval and the first fight was between him and the survivor of the sixty-four wretches, who had begun the day's butchery. Palus, of course, killed his man, but with more appearance of effort and less easily than any adversary he had ever faced under my observation. The people cheered his victory, but not so enthusiastically as usual. He did not appear again till the last event of the day, which was a series of duels between champions in two-horse chariots, driven by expert charioteers, they and the fighters equipped with arms and armor such as was used by both sides at the siege of Troy. Horses are seldom seen in the Colosseum and these pairs, frantic at the smell of blood, taxed to the utmost the skill and strength of their drivers, particularly as they were controlled by the old-fashioned reins of the Heroic period, the manipulation of which calls for methods different from those effective with our improved modern reins.

The charioteers were capable and their dexterous maneuvering for every advantage of approach and relative position won many cheers. Eight pairs fought, then the eight victors paired off, then the four victors, then the two. The sole survivor then retired and while he was out of the arena there entered a superb pair of bay horses, drawing a chariot of Greek pattern, in which, to the amazement of all beholders, was Narcissus, the wrestler, himself, habited as Automedon and acting as charioteer; while beside him, magnificent in a triple crested crimson-plumed helmet of the Thessalian type, in a gilded corselet of the style of the Heroic age, with gilded scales on its kilt-straps, with gilded greaves, with a big gilded Argive shield embossed with reliefs, and holding two spears, manifestly habited as Achilles, stood Palus.

When his refreshed antagonist reëntered in a Trojan chariot and armored and armed as Hector of Troy, Palus handed

his two spears to his Automedon, leapt from his chariot, walked over to Hector's, and spoke to him. I heard it reported afterwards that he said:

"It would spoil the program for Hector to slay Achilles, but you have as much chance of killing me as I of killing you. I am so shaken by Murmex's death that I am not the man I was yesterday morning and up till then. I never felt so nearly matched as by you, not even by Murmex. Attack and spare not. I have given orders that, if you kill me, you shall not suffer for it in any way. I don't want to live, anyhow, now Murmex is dead."

Whether he said this or something else, he spoke earnestly and walked back to his chariot nearby, without any elasticity in his tread.

Narcissus, the wrestler, to the astonishment of the spectators, proved himself a paragon horse jockey. Everyone knew him as a wrestler, as reported the strongest man alive, as claimed by his admirers to have a more powerful hand-grasp than any rival, as the favorite wrestling-mate of the Emperor; all the notabilities had seen him and Commodus wrestle in the Stadium of the Palace; all Rome knew him for a crony of the Prince; yet no one had ever heard him praised or even mentioned as a charioteer. Yet he showed himself a matchless horseman. Hector's charioteer was a master, yet Narcissus outmaneuvered him, gained the advantage of angle of approach and, after many turns, gave Palus his chance. The two great lances flew almost simultaneously; but, as Achilles dodged, Hector fell dying of a mortal wound in the throat.

What followed was, apparently, according to the prearranged program and was indubitably in keeping with the equipment of the two champions and their charioteers; yet it horrified me, and I think all the senators and nobles as well as most of the audience. As Hector sprawled horridly on the sand Narcissus veered his pair and, as they passed the fallen man, Achilles leapt from his chariot. Drawing his Argive sword he slashed the dying man across his abdomen; then, sheathing his blade, he stood, one foot on his adver-

sary's neck and, raising his lance and shield, shouted: "Enalie! Enalie! Enalie!" the old Greek invocation to the war-god. Then he threw aside his lance and shield and stripped off the armor from the dead. Arena-slaves carried it to the pyre and placed it upon it, by Murmex.

Narcissus had wheeled the chariot in a short circle and halted it as near Palus as he could keep it and control the frantic horse. Palus took from one of the hand-holds at the back of the chariot-rail a long leathern thong. With his dirk he slit each foot of the corpse between the leg-bone and the heel-tendon; through the slit he passed the thong, knotting it to his liking. The doubled thong he tied securely to the rear rim of the chariot-bed. Retrieving his lance and shield he posed an instant, every inch Achilles, stepped over Hector's naked corpse and mounted the chariot. From Automedon he took the reins and the whip, passing him his lance, yet retaining his great circular shield, nowise hampered by which he drove the chariot round and round the pyre, the picture, as all could see, he felt, of Achilles placating the ghost of Patroclus.

This exhibition shocked the whole audience, upper tiers and all. The ghost of a hiss breathed under the tense hush of the silent beholders. A shudder ran over the hollow of the amphitheater, as the dragged corpse, mauled by the sand and turning over, became a mere lump of pounded meat. The chill of the onlookers appeared to reach Palus. He halted his team near the pyre, arena-slaves dragged away Hector's corpse, one brought a lighted torch and Palus himself kindled the pyre at each of its four corners, walking twice round it. When it was enveloped in crackling flames, he mounted the chariot and Narcissus drove him out; drove him out, to the horror of all beholders by the Gate of Ill-omen.

After he vanished through that gate no amphitheater ever again beheld Palus the Gladiator.

When he was gone all eyes were fixed on the kindling pyre. The flames blazed up all round it and above it, the smoke mounted skyward in a thick column, the crackle and

roar of the flames was audible all over the amphitheater; so deep was the solemn stillness. I shall carry to my last living hour the vivid recollection of that picture: under the grim gray sky, framed in by the sable hangings which draped the upper colonnade, and by the dingy audience, against the yellow sand, that column of sootv smoke and below it the red glare of the blazing pyre.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ANXIETY

AFTER my seclusion at Baiæ, up to the terrible events which I am about to narrate, by far the most important of my experiences had been my personal observations of the fights of Palus the Gladiator and what I had heard and thought about him. Therefore I have narrated those at length and first. Now I approach the story of my most dreadful miseries.

From my return to Rome my life had gone on much as it had before my master had compelled me to impersonate Salsonius Salinator and, in so doing, to resume my natural appearance as I had looked while my genuine self, and thus, undisguised, to mingle with the associates of my normal early life. After my hair and beard had regained their previous luxuriance and I was again painted, rouged, frizzed, bejeweled, and bedizened, I felt safe and, was in fact, almost entirely safe. In this guise I enjoyed life. Falco was indulgent to me and I had every luxury at my command.

Falco's mania for gem-collecting did not wane, but, if possible, grew on him. His ventures all prospered, his profits from risky speculations poured in, his normal income from his heritage increased; and, of all this opulence, every surplus *denarius* was paid out for gems and curios. Yet he never was so much a faddist as to lose a day from the games

of the circus and the amphitheater. He viewed every show of gladiators, every day of racing, almost every combat and every race.

The day after the spectacular games for Murmex and his more spectacular cremation, the eighth day before the Kalends of January, was nominally the last racing day of the year. The weather was fair and mild. The Circus Maximus was crowded, the Imperial Pavilion blazed with the retinue about the Emperor, he and all of us enjoyed the thirty races of four four-horsed chariots to each. I mention this because it was his last public appearance.

The festivities of the Saturnalia, which I had prepared for according to Falco's orders with lavish prodigality, left me more than a little weary. I spent some days mostly in resting and dozing, being drowsy all day, even with long nights of sound sleep.

On the fatal last day of the year I did not go out, but read or dozed and went early to bed. I slept heavily, knowing nothing from composing myself in bed until I wakened suddenly in the almost complete darkness of the first hint of light at the dawn of a cloudy, windless winter day. I woke with a sense of having been roused, of something unusual; and, vaguely descrying a human figure by my bed asked, sleepily:

"Is that you, Dromo?"

"No," said Agathemer's voice, "it is I."

I raised myself on one elbow, shot through with foreboding. But my apprehensions were mastered by an idle curiosity. I knew he had some imperative reason for coming to me, yet I did not ask his errand, but queried:

"How on earth did you get in?"

"The house-door was open," he said simply.

"But," I marvelled, "I am surprised that the janitor was awake so early."

"He was not," said Agathemer with deliberate emphasis, "he was as fast asleep in his cell on the right of the vestibule as was the watch-dog in his on the left."

"And you walked past both unnoticed?" I hazarded.

"I did," said he, "and you had best warn Falco somehow or induce him to sell his janitor and buy one he can trust or to put in his place some trusty home-slave. That is no sort of a janitor for the house containing the second-largest private gem-collection in all Rome. Nor any sort of watch-dog."

"How came the door unbarred?" I wondered, "who showed you up here?"

"I came up alone," said Agathemer, significantly. "I have not seen a human being except the snoring janitor. This house is at the mercy of any sneak-thief. But you can return to that later. I have come to tell you good news. Commodus is dead!"

"Really?" I quavered.

Oddly enough I felt no sense of relief. Before my eyes arose the picture of Commodus as I had seen him facing the mutineers from Britain before he condemned Perennis: I recalled how often I had heard said of him that he was the noblest born of all our Emperors from the Divine Julius down; that he was the handsomest and the strongest man in any assembly about him, however large; that in his Imperial Regalia he looked more imperial than any man ever had: I contrasted his possession of these qualities with his pitiful squandering of his boundless opportunities, with his frittering away his life on horse-racing, sword-play and such like frivolities. I could not think of myself, only of what Commodus might have been and had not been. I mourned for him and Rome.

Agathemer sat down on the edge of my bed and told his story.

"You know," he said, "that, as gem-expert and as salesman for Orontides, I have many friends in the Palace. I have carefully kept out of it myself and Orontides has acquiesced, for I told him I had good reason to avoid going in there, as you well know I have. If Marcia had seen me she would have recognized me and I should not have lived many hours, for she, believing you dead, would regard me as, of all men, the most likely to see through the utilization

of Ducconius Furfur as a dummy Emperor to free Commodus for masquerading as Palus. She would want me out of the way as the only man in Rome who had known Furfur in Sabinum. Therefore I kept away from the Palace.

"But my good friends among the valets and chamberlains and secretaries, and even higher officials have not only kept me posted as to the most interesting happenings, intrigues and rumors, but one or two close to the Emperor have regularly communicated to me many details of Palace gossip."

Daily, since the death of Murmex, Agathemer had been informed of long, heated and ever longer and more violent discussions between Commodus and Marcia, often with Eclectus also present and participating, for he had been acting towards Commodus more as an equal toward a crony than as Head Chamberlain of the Palace towards his master. Lætus, too had also participated, sometimes in place of Eclectus, sometimes along with him, for he also had been comporting himself more as a chum of Commodus than as Prefect of the Prætorium towards his Emperor.

The substance of the discussions had been always the same. Commodus, at once after the death of Murmex, announced his intention of turning his Imperial duties and dignities over to Ducconius Furfur and of going to the Choragium, there and thenceforward to live and to die as Palus the Gladiator. He declared that as Emperor he never had an hour free from anxiety, always in dread of assassination by poison or otherwise, whereas, as a gladiator among gladiators, he felt perfectly safe and carefree, beloved and watched over by all his companions and certain to win all his fights.

"As Emperor," he said, "I'll not live a year; as Palus I'll most likely die of old age, forty years or more from now. Furfur and I are so alike that no one can tell us apart, so no one will ever suspect that the man acting as Emperor is not the same man who has filled that place ever since Father died."

Marcia had talked to him of his duty and he had rejoined that he had always known that he was unfit to be the Emperor, had feared his responsibilities, had undertaken them unwillingly, had mostly bungled them, and the world would be far better off with anybody else as Emperor, that everybody knew it and that he was despised by the whole Senate and nobility and for that reason more unhappy although he was unhappy enough so anyhow, without the covert jeers of the magistrates; whereas he was the best gladiator ever and all gladiators and experts acknowledged and acclaimed him peerless; as a gladiator he would be happy and enjoy life up to whatever end came to him, preferably an unexpected accidental sudden death such as had befallen Murmex. Ducconius Furfur had not only sat in his throne at shows, but had received embassies, read better than he the addresses composed for him by his Prefects of the Prætorium and Secretaries, knew all the tricks of the office and could and would be a better Emperor than ever he had been.

When Eclectus and Lætus argued with him the results were similar.

Then Marcia admonished him that while Furfur had escaped detection in mere routine matters he was certain to be detected within a few days if he essayed all the Imperial duties before all sorts of people. In that case some sort of revolt would abolish him and put a new Emperor in place of him and any such chosen autocrat would quickly order the death of Palus the Gladiator to assure himself the throne. To this line of argument Commodus had been as deaf as to all other lines.

"Why," he had said, "if I change clothes with Furfur you wouldn't know the difference yourself. If we both were garbed as Emperor, Lætus wouldn't know which to obey. And if my wife and most loyal servant cannot tell which is which when we are side by side and habited alike, who will ever suspect that Furfur is not I when I am out of the way, far off, living as Palus the Swordsman, never alongside the Emperor or in sight at the same time? The plan cannot miscarry."

He had announced that he meant on the Kalends of January to take up his abode in the Choragium and leave the Palace and its adjuncts and all his prerogatives to Ducconius Furfur. He had Furfur in and the five had a heated wrangle. Furfur, after the discussion, had another with Marcia, Eclectus and Lætus, declaring that he thought the scheme as insane as they thought it, but dared not show reluctance for fear of being put to death at once: as an impostor Emperor he would, at least, have a chance, if a faint chance, of success and survival.

Then they all had a long altercation on the last day of the year, during which Commodus cursed Marcia and Eclectus and Lætus and vowed he would have them all executed if they mentioned the subject again. He imperiously bade them acquiesce and so silenced them.

Then he made Furfur, who pretended to him that he was delighted, remain to drink with him. They drank till both were dead drunk and snoring.

Marcia, finding them so, held a consultation with Eclectus and Lætus and proposed to have Narcissus strangle Furfur, saying that with Furfur out of the way Commodus might come to his senses: she would risk his wrath and be resigned to death if she failed to placate him; for, with Furfur dead, he could not carry out his crazy intentions. She said she loved Commodus so much that she was willing to save him even at the cost of her own life.

Eclectus and Lætus acclaimed her plan and were overjoyed at their opportunity, for all three hated Furfur. Yet, all three shrank from going into the room with Narcissus. He, entering alone, mistook the two sleepers, who had changed clothes, and by mistake for Furfur, strangled Commodus. After his victim was indubitably dead and past any possibility of reviving he summoned his accomplices and, when Marcia shrieked and fainted, for the first time realized his blunder.

Then, frantic, he seized Furfur and strangled him to death long before Eclectus had revived Marcia from her swoon.

As Agathemer told it to me all this came out in a haphazard tangle of unfinished sentences, interruptions, fresh starts, questions, answers, repetitions and explanations.

Meanwhile the day had dawned gray and lowering. Of all my strange experiences none were more eery than that talk with Agathemer, beginning in the dark and, with his form and features and expressions effaced, gradually becoming more and more visible. And towards the end of his disclosures he checked himself in the middle of a word and, raising his hand, whispered:

"Hark!"

Silent and tense, we listened. Even in my bedroom, opening on the side gallery of the peristyle, we heard, from over the roofs, cries of:

"The tyrant is dead! The despot is dead! The prize-fighter is dead! The murderer is dead!"

"The news is out!" Agathemer ejaculated, and he breathed a prayer to Mercury, in which I joined. When finally he had told all he had to tell I marvelled:

"Can it be possible that the most intimate and secret conversations of the Prince of the Republic, of the most sedulously guarded man on earth, are thus overheard by underlings and so promptly communicated even to outsiders presumably to be reckoned among his enemies?"

"I conjecture," Agathemer rejoined, "that I am not the only outsider in receipt of information of this kind."

"If you have been, all along," I asked, "in receipt of such information, why have you always talked of Furfur's presence in the Palace and his utilization as a dummy Emperor while Commodus masqueraded as Palus, as a conjecture of yours which you believed, but of which you could not be certain? Why have you not frankly spoken of it as a fact, which many knew of and of which some in a position to know, repeatedly informed you?"

"Because no one ever did so inform me," Agathemer answered, "they merely dropped hints, mostly hints, unnoticed by themselves, unintentionally dropped by them, and uncertainly pieced together by me. While Commodus was alive

each of my informants, however fond of me, however under obligations to me, however anticipative of profit from me, however eager to curry favor with me, yet had vividly before him the dread of death, of death with torture, if any disloyalty of his, any dereliction in deed, word or thought, came to the notice of Commodus or Lætus or Eclectus, or if any one of them came to harbor any suspicion of him. All were vague, guarded, indefinite, cautious.

"Since midnight all that has changed. None fears any retribution for blabbing; all feel an overmastering urge towards confiding in some one. The three who, each unknown to the others, have resorted to me, told me unreckonably more than I previously conjectured. I comprehend the entire situation, now."

"If so," I said, "make me comprehend it. I do not. How could Furfur be coerced or persuaded to such an imposture? How could he be domiciled in the Palace along with Marcia and Commodus and the deception maintained? How could the three personally endure or even sustain the difficulties of the situation?"

"It all hinged," Agathemer explained, "on the fact that Furfur was insanely in love with Marcia, that Marcia hated and loathed him and that Commodus realized how each felt to the other. He was so sure of Marcia's detestation of Furfur that he was never jealous of him, so sure of Furfur's complete subserviency to Marcia that he never feared betrayal by him. Actually, from what I hear, Furfur complied as he did partly from loyalty to Commodus, partly from fear of him, partly, perhaps, from a sort of relish for his risky impersonation, but chiefly because he was wax in Marcia's hands; as, indeed, was every man who came within reach of her fascinations. Does that explain it?"

"Enough," I agreed. "Perhaps as far as it can or could be explained."

"The main thing," said Agathemer, "is that Commodus is dead."

"I should be pleased to hear that," I said, "and I am and I thank you. But, somehow, I am unable to think of

myself. Uppermost in my mind is the thought of the dead autocrat, of his unlimited power, of his inability to surround himself with trustworthy dependents, and of all you have had hinted to you and, even to-night, told you. In such a world, who can consider himself safe?"

Agathemer looked piqued.

"I reckoned," he said, "that you would feel, if not safe, at least less unsafe upon hearing my announcement."

"I do," said I, "for, under any other Prince, I should be less in danger, and, when we learn who is chosen Emperor, it may turn out that I have some chance of rehabilitation."

"Lætus and Eclectus," said Agathemer, "have decided to make Pertinax Emperor. When my informer left the Palace they had already set off to find Pertinax, presumably at his home, and offer him the Principate."

"That," I gloried, "is truly good news. I knew him as a young noble knows many an older senator: he may remember me. He should have nothing against me. You raise my hopes high!"

"By all means be hopeful and cheerful," said Agathemer, "but stick to your present disguise and continue your present way of life until we are sure. Do not be rash."

We consulted further and he said:

"I'll keep away from you except when it seems imperative to talk with you. I shall not send any more letters than I must. Do not write to me. If you must see me, it will be safe to come to Orontides' shop, as Falco is continually sending you there about gems. You can nod to me without any uttered word and I'll then come here as soon as may be."

He left just as dawn brightened into full day.

Among the first proclamations of our new Emperor was one expressly abolishing the court for prosecuting accusations for infringement of the Imperial Majesty by incautious words or inadvertent acts and at the same time decreeing the recall of every living exile banished for such transgressions; also specifically rehabilitating the memory of all persons who had been under Commodus, put to death on

the pretext of this sort of guilt. Before the end of the day on which this decree was promulgated I received a letter from Agathemer in which he wrote:

"Beware! Keep close. Already it is rumored that exceptions to this decree have been made. Marcia is still alive, is married to Eclectus, and Eclectus is confirmed as Palace Chamberlain. With Marcia close to the Emperor you are not safe, no matter who is Emperor. Keep close!"

I followed his advice, which was easy for me to do, as I was very comfortable and well habituated to my life. Moreover I was buoyed up with hope of early rehabilitation and of then marrying Vedia, who sent me one cautiously worded note, congratulating me on the disappearance of my most dangerous foeman, warning me that I still had formidable enemies alive and in high places, and begging me to be prudent. She reiterated her expressions of love, devotion and fidelity.

From Tanno also I received a letter warning me to be on guard and to efface myself as much as possible.

Falco, who had loathed Commodus, but had been careful to keep a still tongue on all matters except horse-racing, sword-play, social pleasures and gem-collecting, was much relieved at his death, and heartily delighted with his successor. He took pains to be present among the auditors of Pertinax whenever nobles were admitted along with the senators to listen to his addresses, which was almost always. He took to heart the new Emperor's adjurations as to economy and his invectives against the evils of speculative enterprises of all kinds. Over our wine after dinner, when we two dined alone together, much as Agathemer and I had when I was my former self, he unbosomed himself to me.

"Pertinax is right," he averred, "there is a real difference between enterprises which enrich only the participants and those which, while profiting their promoters, also add to the wealth of the Republic. I applaud his distinction between the two. I agree with him that wealthy men like me should invest their capital in nothing which does not benefit mankind as well as themselves. I have realized with a shock

of shame that my greed for cash to spend on jewels has led me to embark in ventures which merely divert into my coffers the proceeds of other men's efforts, without adding anything to the sum-total of usable wealth. I mean to withdraw from all such monetary acrobatics and utilize my surplus in extending my estates, in buying others, in cattle-breeding, sheep-raising, goat-herding, and in the cultivation of olives, vines, and other such remunerative growths, along with wheat-farming. Thus I will add to the resources of the Republic, while increasing my own cash income.

"Our conscientious Prince is equally correct in exhorting us to eschew all frivolities. I'll buy no more gems. Nay, I'll auction my collection, as soon as Rome recovers its calm and purchasers are as eager as last year. I'll invest the proceeds in productive enterprise. Thus, as Pertinax says, I shall be a more useful citizen and an even happier man."

Actually he at once initiated his arrangements for closing out the speculative ventures which he controlled and for withdrawing from those in which he participated. And he bought no more gems, though he talked gems as much as previously, or even more, and took great pride in showing visitors over his collection or in conning his treasures in company with me or even entirely alone by himself.

His enthusiasm for Pertinax grew warmer day by day and he talked of him, praising him, lauded him, prophesied for him great things and from him great benefits to the Republic and the Empire.

The alleged conspiracy against Pertinax of Consul Sosius Falco and his disgrace and relegation to his estates was a great shock to my master. That his cousin should plot against the Prince of our Republic, or lay himself open to accusation of such plotting, appeared to him hideous and shameful. He felt disgraced himself, as bearing the same family name. He gloomed and mourned over the matter.

The murder of Pertinax, by his own guards, on the fifth day before the Kalends of April, when he had been less than three months Emperor, was even a more violent shock to Falco, who was crushed with horror at such a crime. He

was even more horrified at the arrogance of the guilty Prætorians and at their shameless effrontery in offering the Imperial Purple to the highest bidder and in, practically, selling the Principiate to so bestial a Midas as Didius Julianus, who, of all the senators, seemed most to misbecome the Imperial Dignity and who had nothing to recommend him except his opulence.

During the days of rioting which followed the murder of Pertinax we, naturally, kept indoors. When the disorders abated and the streets of Rome resumed their normal activities, Falco continued to remain at home. I expostulated with him, but he appeared, suddenly, a changed man, as if dazed and stunned by recent events. He, who had been continually on the go, living in a round of social pleasures, became averse to much of what he had before revelled in. My most ingenious pleadings were required to induce him to go to the Public Baths, which fashionable clubhouses he had frequented every afternoon from his first arrival at Rome. Until the death of Pertinax he had only very occasionally dined alone with me: nearly every day he went out to a formal dinner or entertained a large batch of guests at a lavish banquet. After Pertinax's murder he began to refuse invitations to dine and he gave fewer dinners. He spent a great deal of his time with his lawyers and accountants and went over the affairs of his African estates, minutely, one by one and all of them. He made a new will and told me of it.

"Phorbas," he said, "I am troubled with forebodings. I have never thought of death until recently, except as of something far off and to be considered much later: since the murder of our good Emperor I think of it continually. If I live long enough to see normal conditions restored I shall follow the suggestions given to me by the addresses of Pertinax and shall auction my gems. Meanwhile I dread that I may not live to do so. Therefore I have made a will leaving my entire collection to you. I hereby enjoin you, should you come into possession of them, to sell the gems at auction, as soon as you see fit, and to invest the proceeds

in enterprises which shall add to the wealth of the Republic. This bequest is a trust. Besides I have, as in former wills, bequeathed to you your freedom, and a legacy sufficient to make you comfortable for life. Moreover I have made you the heir of one-fourth of my estate, what remains of it after the gem collections is yours and all specific legacies are paid. I do not love my nephews and cousins and have bequeathed to them more than they deserve; as to the toadies who have hung about me and fawned on me in the hope of legacies, I despise them all. You are my best friend and chief heir."

I thanked him effusively and was so much affected that I myself began to have uncomfortable, vague forebodings. Agathemer happened to visit me and I confided to him the contents of my old leather amulet-bag. Of course I had not worn it since I began life with Falco, as a greasy old amulet-bag of the meanest material and pattern was wholly out of keeping with the character I had assumed. I wore instead a flat locket of pure gold, containing a talisman from the Pontic fastnesses. I had kept my share of our mountain trove of stolen jewels, not needing to part with any after Falco bought me and unconcerned for the gems, as I now needed no such store of savings. Now, suddenly, I felt uneasy about myself, my future and my possessions. These jewels I therefore placed in Agathemer's keeping, sure that they would be safer with him than with me and certain that he could realize on them quickly and transmit to me promptly whatever sums I might need.

I did all I could to rouse Falco from his lethargy and succeeded to some extent. But, all through April and May, he went out little, accepted few invitations and gave few dinners. Much of his time he spent among his jewels, conning them, handling them, taking curios from their cases and, as it were, caressing them. The rooms which held them were on the left hand side of the peristyle on the upper floor, across the court from my apartment and not precisely opposite it. There were three rooms; the larger with a door on the gallery, and a smaller on either side of it, opening

from it and lit by windows towards the gallery. Each room had a marble table in the middle, small and round in both side cabinets, rectangular and large in the main room. Each of the three rooms was walled with cases and shelves; on the shelves were displayed his larger curios, vases, cameos, intaglios, plaques, murrhine bowls and such like; in the cases were necklaces, bracelets, rings, seals and trays of unset gems of all sorts and sizes. Here Falco spent hours each day, gloating over his treasures.

"Phorbas," he said, "I am resolute never to buy another gem, equally resolute to auction all I have whenever conditions make a profitable sale probable. Yet, although I feel that I shall never live to see them auctioned, the very thought of parting with them cuts me to the quick. I am almost in tears to think of it. I love every piece I own. I hate to think I must either live to see them sold or die and leave them. I cannot be with them enough of my time. I could spend all my waking hours enjoying their loveliness and my luck in owning them."

I thought this condition of mind positively unhealthy and consulted Galen.

"You are right," he said, "and you are wrong too. Your master is badly shaken by the horrors of this appalling year, but he is not deranged nor, at this present time, in any more danger of derangement than most of the senators and nobles with whom he associates. Yet you are correct in being uneasy. Don't antagonize him, but do all you can, tactfully and unobtrusively, to keep him away from those jewels and to get him out to the Baths of Titus or to dinners. Do your utmost to induce him to entertain. A jolly dinner with a bevy of jovial guests will be the very medicine for him."

Had I been a Greek I could not have been more wily or more successful. He spent less time with his gems, went out to the Baths oftener, accepted some dinner invitations and gave a few dinners. He even took some interest in preparing for these and in giving orders about them. He had five complete sets of silverware for his *triclinium* and had a

fancy for using this or that set, according to the character of his prospective guests.

Early in May he had invited a carefully selected company of concordant guests, three senators and the rest nobles like himself, and was anticipating a delightful evening. He had bidden me to see to the selection of the flowers for decorating the *triclinium*, for the garlands, and for sprinkling on the floor; to choose the wines I thought would be most appropriate and to have brought out and used his most prized set of silver, the work of Corinnos of Rhodes, embossed with scenes from Ovid's Metamorphoses and acclaimed one of the finest services in Rome. Besides the two tall mixing-bowls for tempering the wine before serving it, the set had four smaller ones, about the size of well-buckets, and much like them, for each was provided with two hinged handles, just like a water-pail. I saw to the polishing of every piece in this magnificent service, to their proper disposal, to the decoration of the *triclinium* with flowers, verified the wines I had chosen, inspected every detail of the preparations for the feast, and, just before the first guest might be expected to arrive, went out and back into the kitchen to make sure that every dish of each course was being properly prepared and that nothing would be lacking.

When I returned to the *triclinium* I found it swept clean of silver, except the two big wine mixers. The four two-handled pails were gone and with them the salt-cellars, the wine strainers, every soup-spoon, every oyster-spoon, in fact every small piece, to the last. The thieves must have been deft, agile and keen, for nothing was overset or disturbed and I had heard no noise.

I rushed to the house-door, found it ajar and, each sleeping in his cell, on the one side the snoring janitor, on the other our fat, pursy, overfed watchdog.

I omit my hasty measures for pursuing the thieves and attempting their capture or at least the recovery of their booty; and my urgent and important efforts to arrange that our guests should be properly received and the dinner should not be spoiled. Towards this last I did what could be done

and with fair success, Falco playing up to my suggestions and dissimulating his chagrin.

More important to record was his amazing indifference to his loss. Not that he did not feel it acutely, but that he seemed to feel no proper indignation against those at fault.

He questioned the janitor and all the slaves concerned, but instead of ordering scourged the two servitors whom I had left in the *triclinium* when I went out of it to visit the kitchen and who should have remained there until my return, he merely reprimanded them mildly. He did not so much as have the undutiful janitor flogged, let alone sent away for sale. He even laughed at the luck, alertness, dexterity and swiftness of the thieves; picturing their glance into the unshut door, their glances up and down the street, their eyeings of the watchdog and janitor, their noiseless dash into the atrium, their invasion of the *triclinium,* their gathering of the smaller pieces into the four handled wine-mixers, and their escape, each with two silver pails stuffed with goblets, salt-cellars, and bowls and, brimming with strainers, spoons and other small pieces.

He commented on their luck in not encountering any of his approaching guests.

"Mercury," he said, "to whom you chiefly pray, must have been good to them, as his votaries."

I was horrified at the levity of his attitude of mind. When we were alone I remonstrated with him, saying that such leniency was certain to demoralize his household; would ruin any set of slaves. I told him that his retention of the janitor after Agathemer's unnoticed entrance on the first day of the year was bad enough, far worse was it to condone a second lapse, and that having had consequences so serious. I expostulated that it was madness to entrust his housedoor to a watchman already twice caught asleep at his post. I reminded him of the cash value of his gem-collection and of its value in his eyes, not to be reckoned in cash. He listened indulgently and said:

"I thank you, Phorbas. All you say is true. And, any time last year, I should have sold that janitor without a

thought, after your information against him last January. But, somehow, since the murder of Commodus, yet more since the murder of Pertinax, I seem less prone to severity and more inclined to mercy. The waiter-boys deserve flogging, but I cannot harden my heart and order it. The janitor merits being sold without a character, after a severe scourging; yet I feel for him, too. I'll give him another chance."

I could not move him.

I again consulted Galen:

"You are right!" he exclaimed. "A Roman nobleman who hesitates to have his slaves flogged or sold and merely reprimands them, is certainly deranged. Any natural Roman would insist on scourgings and even severer punishments. But his eccentricity is not dangerous to him or anybody as yet. Humor him, do not oppose his worship of his treasures, but entice him away from them all you can by devices he does not suspect.

"And let me add, keep away from me, for your own sake. Keep away from Vedia and Tanno and Agathemer. Do not write letters. True, Julianus has put Marcia to death and you are rid of a pertinacious and alert enemy. But he has recalled into favor most of the professional informers who flourished under Commodus and they are on the watch for victims to win them praise and rewards. Several of the exiles recalled by Pertinax have been rearrested and rebanished or even executed since Julianus came into power. Keep close and beware!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

ACCUSATION

THE murder or assassination or execution of Julianus on the Kalends of June shocked Falco even more than the deaths of Commodus and Pertinax. As the June days passed I had to exercise my greatest adroitness to keep him from spending all his waking hours indoors, chiefly in moping

about his collection of gems. I did pretty well with him, for I wheedled him into going to the Baths of Titus three afternoons out of four, into going out to dine one evening in three, and I even induced him to give several formal dinners, each of which was a great success.

But, if I left him to himself, I invariably found him glooming over the gems which no longer gave him any real pleasure. And I could not blame him. Indoors one felt reasonably safe in Rome that June, for no residences had been broken into anywhere in the city, though many shops had been looted and some burnt. But, in the streets, the insolence of the Prætorians was unendurable and their unbridled license and arrogance terrorized the entire population, especially the upper classes. Going anywhere in broad daylight was dangerous, even going to the Baths of Titus from the Esquiline was risky. Anyone like Falco was certain to feel safer indoors. And the tense uncertainty of those twenty-four days made everybody restless, feverish, fidgety and morose: civil war between Severus and Pescennius Niger, lord of the East, was inevitable. How Clodius Albinus, in control of Gaul, Spain and Britain, would act, was problematical. We were all keyed-up, apprehensive and wretched.

Our suspense was shorter since it turned out that Severus had made up his mind and begun to make his rapid and effective arrangements as soon as he heard of the murder of Pertinax. Pertinax was murdered on the fifth day before the Kalends of April and so swiftly travelled the imperial couriers who were his friends and who arranged to set out at once and carry Severus the news, that the first of them rode more than eight hundred miles in eight days and reached him at Caruntum in Pannonia on the Nones of April. Severus was cautious, kept secret what he had heard and moved seventy-two miles nearer Rome to Sabaria in Pannonia, where, after the news was confirmed beyond question, he harangued the soldiers and was by them saluted Emperor on the Ides of April. At once he assured himself of the support or acquiescence of his officers and won over

the local authorities and garrisons all over Illyricum, Noricum and Rhætia. Bands of his most trusted soldiers set off towards Rome by every road. He gathered his forces, made sure of their loyalty and began his march. He was already at Aquileia when the news of the death of Julianus reached him there on the Nones of June. He marched straight to Rome and on the tenth day before the Kalends of July, the day of the summer solstice, was outside the city, accompanied by the delegation of senators who had met him at Interamnia and surrounded by the six hundred picked men who acted as his personal guards, who, it was rumored, had not taken off their corselets day nor night since they left Sabaria.

The next day, the ninth day before the Kalends of July, we heard with amazement that the Prætorians had been cowed, had surrendered their standards to Severus and had been disarmed. Certainly knots of them hung about the streets and squares, all in ordinary tunics and rain hats, shorn of their uniforms as well as of their weapons, and looking not only humbled but frightened. It was rumored that all of those directly concerned with the murder of Pertinax had been not only disarmed and stripped of their uniforms, but actually stripped naked and scourged out of the camp by the Illyrian legionaries who had surrounded and cowed them, and ordered to flee the neighborhood of Rome and never again to approach within a hundred miles of the capitol.

From noon of that day the whole city was in a ferment, preparing for the entry on the morrow of our new Emperor. This was acclaimed the most magnificent spectacle ever beheld in Rome; certainly I was never spectator of anything so impressive. The day was fair, almost cloudless, mild and warm, but pleasant with a gentle breeze. From where Falco and I viewed the procession, nearer the Forum, we gazed about on a wondrous picture: the blue sky above, under it a frame of roofs, mostly of red tiles, some of green weathered bronze among them giving variety, and here and there

a temple roof of silver gleaming in the sun, not a few gilded and flashing.

As far as we could see about us every balcony was hung with tapestries gay with particolored patterns, every doorway and window was wreathed in flowers, countless braziers sent up columns of scented smoke. The streets were lined with throngs habited in togas newly whitened; spectators of both sexes, the men in white togas, their women in the brightest silks, crowded every window, loggia, balcony, roof, and other viewpoint. The chattering of the crowds ceased when the head of the procession appeared, and, in a breathless hush, we saw leading it on horseback, with two mounted aides, Flavius Juvenalis, who had been third and last Prefect of the Prætorium to Julianus and who, as an honorable gentleman and loyal official, had been confirmed and continued in this post by Severus. Behind him tramped, in serried ranks, an entire legion of the Pannonian troops, in full armor with their great shields gleaming and the sun sparkling on their gilded helmets and their spear-points.

Behind them came ten of the elephants with which Julianus, in his futile, bungling attempts at preparations for resistance, had had some of his men drill. Each now carried in his tower eight Danubians, four tall Dacian spearmen and four Scythian archers, bow in hand, leaning over the edge of the howdah.

Behind the elephants came Norican legonaries carrying the surrendered standards of the disbanded Prætorian Guard; not held aloft, but trailed, half inverted.

Then, amid roars of cheers, came Severus himself, habited not in his general's regalia, but in the gorgeous Imperial robes, as if already in the Palace and about to give a public levee. Though thus clad as in time of peace and walking all the way on foot, he was hedged about by his faithful six hundred, every man stepping alertly, helmet-plumes waving, helmets glittering, shields gleaming, spear-points asparkle, kilt-straps flapping, scabbards clanking, a grim advertisement of irresistible power.

After this guard walked our entire Senate, and, as the Emperor and Senate acknowledged the acclamations of the onlookers, passing amid thunders of cheering, behind we saw a long serpent ribbon of Illyrian legionaries, every man fully armed and armored as for instant battle, their even tramp sounding grim and monotonous when the cheerers paused for breath, their resistless might manifest. Indubitably Rome belonged to Severus, he was our master.

Falco, hopeful, yet awed, said little. Once inside his housewalls he fled to his beloved gems and solaced himself with them till it was time for his bath, which he took in his private bathrooms. He and I dined alone and talked chiefly of our hopes of the new Emperor. Falco particularly remarked his appearance of hard commonsense, ruthless decision and flinty resolve.

Next day, soon after dawn, we heard many rumors of disorders by the Illyrian troops, of their having used temples for barracks that night, of cook-shops forced to feed them without payment, of shops plundered and pedestrians robbed. Naturally the entire household kept indoors, except such slaves as went out for fresh vegetables, fruits and fish. I solaced myself by reading the Tragedies of Ennius. I read parts of his Hector, Achilles, Neoptolemus, Ajax and Andromache, with much emotion, and especially the Bellerophon, forgetting everything else. Then I slept until late in the afternoon.

Waking I bathed unhurriedly and then went to call Falco, who liked to bathe at the last possible moment before dinner. I walked round the rear gallery of the peristyle, sure of finding him among his jewels. The door of the middle room was not shut, and barely ajar. Against the sill of the door, on the brown and white mosaic pavement of the gallery, a glint of color caught my eye. I stooped and picked up a fine uncut emerald, one of Falco's chief treasures.

A qualm of apprehension shot through me. I pushed the door, entered and swept the room with a glance. A confusion of jewel-trays cluttered the floor, no sign of Falco.

Nor was he in the left-hand room, which had been similarly rifled.

But, when I turned and peered through the right-hand inner door I saw, across the marble center-table, horridly sprawled, what I instantly knew for his corpse, so unmistakably did the head hang loose, the arms dangle, the legs trail: he was manifestly a corpse, even without sight of the dagger-hilt projecting from his back.

I rushed to him and touched him.

He was yet warm, the blood still trickled from about the dagger, driven deep under the left shoulder blade, slanting upwards, the very stroke Agathemer had drilled me in early in our flight, the stroke with which I had slaughtered two of the five bullies at Nona's hut!

I plucked out the dagger, gazing at it in horror.

As I did so I heard footsteps behind me and turned to face Casperius Asellio, and Vespronius Lustralis, two of the most persistent of the toadies who hung about Falco, both of whom hated me consumedly.

In a flash I realized my situation. Had I been a freeman I should have been commiserated by all as a gentleman who had had the misfortune to find his best friend foully murdered; as a slave I would be assumed by all Rome to have been caught in the act of assassinating my kind and indulgent master; and, recalling Tanno's invectives against me at my last dinner at Villa Andivia, I knew I was liable to be tortured until I confessed my guilt!

Asellio and Lustralis flung themselves on me with execrations and their yells brought the entire household. My protestations were unheeded. No one would listen to my valet's assertion that he had found the janitor asleep in his cell and roused him just before Lustralis and Asellio reached the entrance, that he had but just finished dressing me when he went down to the vestibule. No one heeded my denials or my urgings that I could not have rifled the collection, that the looters and the murderers must be the same individuals, that I was clearly innocent. Asellio and Lustralis

not merely seized me, but rained blows on me. I knew I could knock both senseless without half trying, but, in my character of effeminate oriental exquisite, I must not advertise my real strength. I struggled, but half-heartedly.

The house-boys and any of Falco's retinue who could reach me, thumped me and mauled me. I was horrified to realize all of a sudden that those who had made most of me had always envied me in secret; that, to a man, they hated me; that each and all would use every effort to ensure my ruin; that I had to face perjury, unanimous perjury, gushing from an abundant well-head of malignity, spite, and enmity. My valet alone seemed on my side, and he could assist me not at all.

I was bound with ropes knotted till my hands and feet swelled, till the cords cut into my flesh. I was abused, my clothing torn till I was half naked. I was whacked and clawed till I was bleeding in a dozen places; I was reviled, jeered at and threatened. Trussed like a fowl to be roasted, I was half hustled half dragged, almost carried, down into the courtyard. From there, after no long wait, I was haled off to the slaves' prison in the Slave-Dealers' Exchange next the Slave-Market. There I was released from my bonds, heavy shackles were riveted on my ankles and I was cast into the lower dungeon.

I had had time to tell Dromo, my faithful valet, to inform Agathemer. I knew he, in turn, would inform Tanno and Vedia. I was certain that they would do all that they could. But I dreaded that they could do nothing. I was despondent, despairing. Actually, Dromo must have been clever, prompt and judicious, and Agathemer equally quick and resourceful, with the fullest possible help from Tanno and Vedia, and they must have taxed to the utmost their influence and their means.

After a night almost sleepless I was visited at dawn by no less a person than Galen himself.

"My boy," he said, "you are in a terrible situation and we were in a quandary how to advise you. But, after much discussion, we are agreed that you have some chance of life

as Phorbas the slave, accused of murdering his master, whereas you have no chance at all as Andivius Hedulio, proscribed along with Egnatius Capito. Our new Emperor seems to feel that all enemies of former Princes are foes of his; he seems to have ordered his agents to be on the lookout for all living persons accused, relegated, or banished under Julianus, Pertinax and Commodus. Those taken in Rome have been promptly executed. By all means, whatever happens to you, whatever threatens you, give no hint that you are Andivius Hedulio. Endure what befalls and hope for life and safety and ultimate rehabilitation.

"Of course I can see you as often as I please without exciting any suspicion. You were, while yourself and prosperous, only one of my countless patients, never among those I made much of. You, as Phorbas, have been under my special care, as the darling of poor Falco, who was one of my best friends, though I had known him so short a time. My visits here cannot prejudice your welfare and may help you, even save you.

"Cheer up! Agathemer says that the real murderers are certain to betray themselves by attempting to dispose of some of the stolen gems. He is right. And he had taken measures to ensnare them. He has warned or is warning every gem-dealer in Rome, from Orontides himself down to the most disreputable scoundrel who makes a living by exchanging his cash for stolen gems. He has sent off despatches already along many postroads, by the couriers who set out at dawn, notifying all gem-dealers in the towns along these roads to be on the watch for the miscreants. He will continue this until the warning is all over Italy from Rhegium and Brundisium to the Alps, and that within a few days. Those precious gentry are certain to be nabbed either in Rome or elsewhere. Whenever they are identified and in durance it will be easy to clear you.

"Meanwhile you will be tried as a slave accused of murdering his master and the investigation will include the questioning of every slave in the house at the time of the murder. I know you are aquiver with dread of torture;

there will be torture, but I assure you you will not be tortured. As much can be done today by influence and bribery as could be done under Perennis or Cleander, only it cannot be done so crudely and openly, and much else can be done openly.

"We have endeavored to arrange to have you tried by a bunch of jurymen presided over by a prætor, just as if you were a freeman, according to Hadrian's law. But Commodus had repealed all such laws mitigating the rigors of procedure in the case of slaves and Severus has not had them reënacted. So you will be tried by a magistrate, a deputy of the Prefect of the City, as slaves were tried before Hadrian's time.

"We shall have, at the trial, to cheer you up, to counsel you, and, if necessary, to intervene in your behalf, as clever an advocate as any in Rome. Keep up a good heart, and read these letters."

And he went off.

I had a proof of the truth of what he said of bribery within half an hour, for I was bathed, my hurts dressed, and I was clothed in new, clean and comfortable garments and served with abundant eatable food and good wine.

I had promptly read the letters.

Agathemer's Galen had anticipated, mostly. Besides briefly telling me of his measures for detecting the murderers, and prophesying their success, he assured me of his devotion and alertness to take advantage of any chance to help me.

Tanno pledged me his utmost efforts to assist me, and emphasized his hope that the influences which he and Vedia could enlist in my behalf and the cash at their disposal would protect me from the worst horrors of trial as a slave and would ultimately clear me and free me from danger.

Vedia wrote:

"The Leopard-Tamer's bride gives greeting to the Leopard-Tamer. Keep up your courage! Do not be despondent, but have a hopeful heart. All that gold, all that influence can do for you, shall be done. Cheer up! You will live

to see yourself a free man, unsmirched by any accusation, you and I will be married and live many years of happiness afterwards: Farewell."

Investigations of murders are prompt in Rome and trials of accused slaves quickly disposed of. Before the next morning was half way to noon, on the fifth day before the Ides of July, I found myself, still shackled, but well fed and well clad, in the Basilica Sempronia, before the magistrate charged with deciding such cases. He turned out to be young Lollius Corbulo, whom I had not set eyes on until he came to know me as Phorbas, for he was an art amateur of high standing, considering his youth.

I never have discovered how much he was influenced by his natural kindliness of disposition, how much by personal regard for me, how much by Tanno, acting for himself and Vedia, whether he had been bribed or not. He, when I questioned him in after years, passed it off with a smile saying that anyone would accept a gift on condition of doing what he meant to do uninfluenced, that no one needed a gift to make him do the right thing. From Agathemer, Tanno and Vedia I have never been able to extract any admissions as to their activities in my behalf. Anyhow Corbulo gave a demonstration of the great latitude which is permitted both by law and custom to such a magistrate in such a case. He ordered my shackles removed, and, while they were being filed through, sent off three of his apparitors in charge of Dromo to fetch some of my own garments from my apartments in Falco's house.

He went about his investigation like a fair-minded man who meant to favor no one and to ferret out the exact truth.

Corbulo in his full senatorial attire, the broad crimson stripe more conspicuous than the white of his toga, sat in his chair at the center of the apse of the basilica, his apparitors behind him. In the nave of the basilica, surrounded by guards, were herded those members of Falco's retinue who had been in his house at the time of his murder. Further down the nave were many outsiders, come to listen to the trial. In the aisles were gathered hangers-on of the court.

In the apse, to the left and right of the tribunal, stood many of Falco's friends, among whom I recognized Casperius Asellio and Vespronius Lustralis. Among those on the other side of the magistrate were Tanno and Galen.

The bare, bleak interior of the ancient, old-fashioned basilica, with its blackened roof-beams, unadorned walls, Travertine columns of the severest Tuscan pattern, and plain window-lattices, made an austere setting for the trial. I saw nowhere any rack, winches, horse, or any other engine or torture; but, while Dromo was gone, four muscular court-slaves came tramping in, each supporting a pole end. The two long poles were passed through the four ear-handles of a bronze brazier all of five feet square, level full of glowing charcoal, the brilliant bed of coals radiating an intense heat perceptible as they passed near me. When they had set it down in full view of all and near the tribunal one of them shook out and folded four-thick a thin Spanish blanket of harsh wiry wool and spread the square of it by the brazier, squatting on it to tend the coals with a long-handled five pronged altar-hook.

When Dromo returned with my garments and I was clad as Phorbas, Corbulo questioned me as to when Falco had bought me, where and from whom. To my relief he did not ask me how Rufius Libo had acquired me. He did ask my age, but nothing else concerning my past. As to my life with Falco in Africa and at Rome, he questioned me closely. I told him all about Falco's character, his gem-collecting, the effect on him of the murders of Commodus and Pertinax, his forebodings and his utterances to me about his will. When he felt that he knew all I had to tell along these lines, he said:

"Now tell me your version of your master's death."

He heard me out and said:

"I believe you. You speak like a truth-teller."

He then questioned the janitor, who babbled and cringed, half unintelligibly, but stoutly denying that he had slept at his post on the seventh day before the Kalends of July.

"I am of the opinion," said Corbulo, drily, "that you are lying."

Then to his apparitors he said:

"Strip him."

The court-slave, the charcoal-tender, stood up off his folded blanket and shook it out. The janitor, stripped and bound, ankles lashed, hands trussed behind him, was haled towards the brazier. The blanket was flung round him and four apparitors lifted him as if he had been a log and held him near the brazier, the enveloping blanket drawn tight over his left thigh and its outer underside nearest the coals, tilting him sideways to bring the soft thickness of the thigh closest to the heat. They watched the tight blanket over his thigh and moved him a little away from the brazier when the wool began to smoke.

I had never seen nor heard of this kind of torture, but it seemed effectual. The fellow writhed, groaned, squalled and protested. After Corbulo had him brought back before him he confessed that he had been asleep in his cell from some time before Falco's murder until he was aroused by Dromo, just before the arrival of Casperius and Vespronius.

One by one the other slaves were questioned. Three declared that they had seen the janitor asleep not long before they heard the alarm.

Several more testified that the janitor had often been asleep. More than half of them confirmed my story of the theft of the silver on the Nones of May. Except the janitor not one was tortured, though Corbulo threatened with torture several who hesitated in their testimony.

After the slaves Corbulo questioned Asellio and Lustralis.

Then, when they had stood aside, he gazed about at the spectators in the nave, at the crowd behind them, interested in the next case or in others to come up later, at the hangers-on in the side aisles; for a time, mute, he stared at the glowing charcoal fire in the big brazier.

When he spoke he said:

"It is my opinion that Phorbas is innocent. I have inspected the house where the murder took place. From the

condition of the looted rooms it is plain that more jewelry was stolen than any one man could carry off. Manifestly two men participated in the robbery and murder and escaped with their booty, very likely the same pair who robbed Falco's *triclinium* on the Nones of May. The janitor's confessed delinquency explains how they entered and got away unhindered and unseen. The dead man's heirs should punish the janitor. I hold no other slave at fault. Has any man anything which he wishes to say before I pass formal judgment for official record?"

Lustralis asked permission to speak and amazed me by his fluency, his ingratiating delivery, his vehemence, his ingenuity and the fantastic malignity of his contentions. Corbulo heard him out to the end, unmoving as a statue.

"You do not look like a lunatic nor act like one, Lustralis," he said, "but you talk like one. Phorbas has impressed me by every feature of his tale. He appears to have told the truth. He seems to have been a sincere friend to his late master. I cannot credit the wild suggestion that a man of his character would plot his master's death, or that a man of his intelligence, with a full knowledge of the terms of his master's will, would expose himself to suspicion by so plotting; far less that such a man as he would ignore the perils of such a crime and so desire his freedom and the legacies promised him as to league himself with two criminals, assist them to enter the house and to escape from it, and hope to come off unscathed and unsuspected and forever unbetrayed.

"But, suppose all you imagine and insinuate is true in fact. Prove it! Produce the two robbers! Prove them the robbers by recovering their booty! If they, so convicted of the robbery, are brought before me, if they accuse Phorbas of being their accomplice, if they tell a consistent and convincing tale, if any colorable motive for such association and such a crime can be alleged against Phorbas, then I'll believe him guilty, and not till then."

He eyed Lustralis, who spoke further.

"Torture Phorbas!" Corbulo cried. "Absurd! In my court I never torture men like him, any more than if they

were freemen. And though it might be imperative to torture him for a confession if all the testimony pointed to his guilt, it is ridiculous to suggest torturing him merely to corroborate evidence demonstrating his innocence.

"I, hereby, officially as the representative of the Commonwealth, pronounce Phorbas cleared of all charges connected with this case. I hereby enjoin all men to assist the Republic to detect and apprehend the murderers who robbed Falco and killed him."

Lustralis and Asellio looked baffled and sour. A murmur of approval ran through the bystanders. My fellow-slaves congratulated each other and rejoiced, save only the janitor.

Galen approached me.

"Phorbas," he said, "as you are now a freeman by your late master's will, which will soon be read and its provisions put into effect, at which reading I shall be present as one of the legatees, you may now go where you like. I invite you to come with me."

I thanked Corbulo, who said:

"Don't thank me. I did just what any sane, clear-headed, fair-minded magistrate must do, affirmed the manifest truth."

Galen led me off to a modest apartment near the Carinæ. I found everything prepared for my comfort, slaves to wait on me and nothing omitted. I thanked him.

"Tanno," he said, "deputed me to hire this lodging for you. He has kept in the background. These are my slaves, put at your disposal and enjoined to obey you as they would obey me in person. Keep quiet here till I can arrange for you to take possession of your legacies from Falco. I think he left you all your personal belongings and the slaves who waited on you. As soon as the necessary formalities are completed I'll send them to you.

"Do not attempt to communicate with Vedia or Tanno. Do nothing which might betray you as your actual self. Our new Emperor seems resolute to exterminate, to the last individual, all persons implicated in any conspiracy not only against Julianus or Pertinax, but against Commodus, from

the date of his accession. All such persons apprehended are promptly executed. Keep quiet. Efface yourself till I give you the word. I can communicate with you freely, can see you daily, if need be, since I am one of poor Falco's heirs and was your physician during his life here in Rome. I'll do all I can for you."

He left and I bathed, ate, and slept the rest of that day and slept sound all night.

Next day passed similarly. But, early on the following day, the third day before the Kalends of July, not long after sunrise, my new valet came to me his face ashen. He babbled some unintelligible syllables and before I could comprehend him, my bedroom was entered by a Pannonian sergeant, grim as the centurions from Britain who had liberated Agathemer and me from the *ergastulum* at Placentia. Behind him were four legionary soldiers. I was rearrested!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

TORTURE

I WAS promptly haled off to the same prison where Galen had visited me three days before. There I was again deprived of my garments and clad in others, new, but of cheap material, coarse and uncomfortable. Also shackles, heavier shackles, were at once riveted on my ankles, and I was again consigned to the lower dungeon. I was, to be sure, given good and abundant food and wine not too unpalatable. Otherwise I had no indulgences and there I spent the night.

Next day, the last day of June, Galen again visited me.

"My lad," he said, "the first rule of medicine is to cheer up the patient, but I must say that your case looks grave and I have little cheer for you. I shall do my best and so will Tanno, Vedia and Agathemer. But we are all dazed.

We cannot understand what has happened, nor who has brought it to pass, nor what influences are working against us.

"But someone has gotten the ear of Juvenalis or of Severus himself. It has been represented plausibly to the Prefect of the Prætorium, or perhaps even to the Emperor in person, that the courts here in Rome have fallen into a shocking state of disrepute on account of decisions in scandalous contravention of the evidence, brought about by favoritism and bribery. It has also been plausibly represented that the slave-population has little respect for the lives or property of their masters, less loyalty towards them and very little dread of punishment. Your alleged murder of poor Falco is held up as a flagrant example of the latter condition, your acquittal as an even more flagrant instance of the degradation of the courts.

"Believing that a shocking miscarriage of justice has taken place concerning an atrocious crime, the Prefect or the Prince has ordered you rearrested and retried, tomorrow, this time before Cassius Ravillanus."

I shuddered, not metaphorically, but actually. I felt cold all over, as if plunged into an icy mountain stream. Ravillanus claimed as his ancestor Cassius Ravilla and aimed at emulating him. Certainly, as a magistrate, he quite frankly talked and acted as if acquittal were a disgrace to the court, and the object of each trial not impartial justice but the conviction of the accused. He was perfectly sincere, upright in every intention, incorruptible, fanatical, self-opinionated, austere, ascetic, stern and harsh. I shuddered again and again at the thought of him.

"Ravillanus has the reputation of being unbribable," Galen went on, "and it is a question whether an attempt at bribery might not prejudice your case more than letting matters be. Yet I have employed an agent far too clever to bungle any approach, and something may be done for you. Vedia is despondent, but resolute to keep her head and help you all she can, and she has cash to spare and much influ-

ence. Tanno has even more of both. Agathemer is hopeful of running down the real murderers, as they are loaded with their booty. If they are caught we can clear you.

"Keep up a brave heart."

I tried to, but it was impossible. I ate little and slept hardly at all.

The next day, the Kalends of July, saw me haled again to the Basilica Sempronia.

There I beheld a scene almost a duplicate of my first trial; a similar throng of spectators, very similar bevies of expectant witnesses, advocates and prosecutors; the same batch of my former fellow-slaves, surrounded by the same guards; the very same charcoal-brazier tended by the same slave squatting on the same folded blanket; similar knots of notables in the apse, about and behind the magistrate's tribunal; the same carved arm-chair; in it not Corbulo, but Cassius Ravillanus, lean, dry, tanned, leathery, smooth-shaven, bald and stern.

He glared at me when my guards halted me four yards or so in front of him; then he beckoned to one of his apparitors and spoke to him in an undertone. The fellow went off as if on an errand.

Ravillanus then gave, even more positively than Corbulo, a demonstration of the great latitude permitted such a magistrate in procedure, of how completely it lies within his discretion what to do and how to do it.

"Fellow!" he ranted, "you have plotted to rob and murder your master, you have done both and you have, by favor and influence and perhaps even by bribery, arranged for your easy acquittal. I am charged by the Prince of the Republic to see to it, that the majesty of the law, the sacredness of the lives of Roman noblemen, and the security of their property be publicly vindicated: I am here to undo all that Lollius Corbulo supinely allowed to be done. You shall perceive that I am wholly unlike any such trifler. Of one feature only of his procedure do I approve. I highly acclaim his notions as to the right kind of torture. Slaves like you, however pampered, are property, like horses or cattle. Their

value lies in their usefulness. Any slave, after torture, should be as useful to his owners as before. If a slave is placed upon the horse and weights hung to his feet, his legs are often made helpless, he cannot ever walk again, he is a cripple. Still oftener does the rack leave a slave utterly useless. Our courts have always desired some form of torture by which the recalcitrant could be made to suffer acute pain, but not in any way injured. Lollius has introduced a torture which never injures anyone subjected to it, but which causes extreme agony while in use. Only stretch a hard-yarn Spanish blanket over a thigh, draw it tight and hold the thigh at just the right distance from just the right size of brazier with its coals properly tended, and the subject can be made to tell the truth; but not broiled alive, for the blanket will singe before the flesh under it cooks. You had best tell the truth, not such an ingenious string of lies as you told before Lollius."

Then he had all my fellow-slaves brought up and ranged before him.

"Your master," he said, "has been foully done to death. If the guilt of this hideous crime can be indubitably fastened upon one of you or two or any few, the rest of you shall be held innocent and shall suffer no penalties. If no facts can be ascertained limiting the guilt to some of you, all of you, according to the ancient law concerning such cases, shall be put to death by crucifixion or exposure to the beasts in the arena, as our Prince may prefer. I have no desire to send to death any guiltless man. I enjoin you all to tell the truth and to assist the law. The truth-tellers will suffer less of the torture."

He then, beginning with the scullions, had every boy and man tortured over the brazier, asking no question of any till he had felt the heat of the fire and had begun to yell for mercy. Then he would interrupt the torture, question the victim, bid the torturers again hold their subject close to the fire; and again suspend the torture and ask questions. Naturally the victims, frantic with pain and terror, said whatever they thought would get them off.

Also, to my horror, I realized for the first time, what I had only vaguely suspected before, how venomously they had envied me, how violently embittered most of them were against me, how they had hated their master's favorite. They were glad to slander me, they enjoyed assisting at my ruin, they relished the prospect of my being tortured and executed. Moreover it appeared that they had been carefully coached in what they were to say or had agreed among themselves, without any outside hints, or after such hints.

The whole household made it appear that they had always suspected me of desiring Falco's death in order that I might gain my freedom and enjoy his promised legacies; that I had enticed and wheedled him into leaving me in his will an absurdly large share of his property.

They were also unanimous in declaring that they had been unable to bring home to me the devising of the robbery of the *triclinium*, but they had all felt certain from the first that I had arranged to have confederates of mine steal the table silver. They were equally consistent in asserting that they all believed that I had murdered Falco, after arranging for the looting of the gem-collection as a blind.

Hour after hour I had to stand and watch wretch after wretch held to the glowing coals, had to listen to the shrieks of the victims, could not but realize that Ravillanus was bent on my conviction, that nothing would swerve him from his purpose.

Dromo, alone of all the household, alone of my obsequious, indulged personal servants, held out against the torture and though he writhed, yelled, sobbed and even endured the pain until he fainted more than once, refused to say anything against me.

After Dromo my turn came. When I was stripped Ravillanus rubbed his hands and remarked:

"You have your character written on your back! How could Falco trust a fellow so branded and scarred! Easy-going masters like Falco not only bring on their own deaths, but sap the foundations of safety for all slave-owners. Your back, in advance, advertises you guilty. Better own up."

I pass over the details. But I must confess that I was ar from heroic. Perhaps it is true, and not an invention, hat Marcus Scævola voluntarily thrust his hand into the ltar-fire and stood mute and smiling, and watched it burn nd char. If any man ever did that he had more self-control han I ever had. I could not repress every indication of my gonies. I fainted so many times that I lost count. The fternoon was drawing on towards evening before Ravillanus egan to lose patience.

Tanno and Galen had been from the first among those bout the tribunal. Now, in a pause, while I was being rought back to consciousness to be again tortured, Galen suceeded in gaining the attention of Ravillanus enough to nduce him, though grudgingly, to permit the celebrated adocate, Memmius Tuditanus, whom they had brought with nem, to speak in my behalf. I had regained consciousness efore he began to speak and heard most of what he said. Ie spoke well.

His chief point was that a gem-expert and art-amateur ke me, knowing that he was to inherit one of the finest and ost carefully chosen collections of gems and art objects in ll the world, would be the last man on earth to allow it to e disturbed, let alone to plot its ransacking, the pillage of s cases and the dispersal of their precious contents. No an could better have exposed the absurdity of the whole imsy and preposterous fabrication that I had had two conederates, who had, in my interest and at my suggestion, obbed first the *triclinium* and then the gem-collection, after hich last I had myself murdered Falco.

But his logic, his lucidity and his eloquence fell on deaf ars. Ravillanus was unmoved. He permitted Lustralis to ake a rambling and incoherent harangue, setting forth his diculous contentions.

Then he passed judgment:

"I hold you all innocent save Phorbas alone. Dromo is anifestly devoted to Phorbas and has lied in his behalf. ut Dromo, apparently, was no accomplice in the plot or in e murder. I acquit him with the rest. Phorbas, who

vilely plotted against his master, who foully murdered him, I adjudge guilty of his death and I hereby condemn him to be kept chained in the slaves' prison until the next day of beast-fighting in the Colosseum, then, in the arena, to be exposed to the ferocity of the famished wild beasts of the desert, wilderness and forest, by them to be lacerated and torn to pieces, as he richly deserves."

Tanno and Galen could indicate their grief and sympathy only by looks and gestures, for they dared not attempt to approach me.

Then Ravillanus called:

"Where is that barber?"

The apparitor who had gone off before the trial began produced a barber.

"Trim his hair and beard!" Ravillanus ordered. And I had to submit to having my long locks shorn and my beard clipped close, leaving me far too like my true former self for my comfort, since I still had hopes of Agathemer catching the real murderers in time to save me from the doom impending over me because of the fanaticism of Ravillanus, while I anticipated nothing but inescapable death should I be recognized as not Phorbas, but as Andivius Hedulio.

I was then, late in the afternoon of the Kalends of July, haled off to the Colosseum and immured in one of the cells of the lowermost crypt, far below the street level. To my amazement I found myself sharing the cell with Narcissus, who had been similarly condemned to exposure to the beasts, as the murderer of Commodus.

Together we spent five dreadful days in the darkness, dampness, chill and foulness of that tiny cell. I found that influence such as Tanno and Vedia possessed and cash such as they had at their disposal, could do much even for the occupant of such a cell, destined to such a doom. I was visited by Galen, more than once, and he emphasized the still hopeful possibility, nay probability, that Agathemer might, in time, save me, run down and bring before a magistrate the real murderers. I was gloomy, I admit. But his

presence in that horrible hole and his words cheered me, by brightening the hope I had never wholly lost.

Also I was tended, massaged, rubbed, chafed, washed each day in warm water brought in big pails and poured into a big, shallow pan; I was anointed; clothed in a comfortable tunic, strengthened with plenty of good food and strong wine and provided with a cot and bedding and blankets. I was able to have Narcissus indulged also, in order that he might be a less unpleasant cell-mate.

He talked to me freely of life in the Palace, of Commodus, of Marcia, of Ducconius Furfur, of his own fatal mistake, of the amazing likeness, even apparent identity, between Furfur and Commodus, of the naturalness of his inability to tell them apart.

I drank and ate all the food and wine I could swallow, slept all I could, and tried to be hopeful.

Thus passed five horrible days and six hideous nights.

After no more than twelve days, as I learned later, Severus felt himself securely established as Prince of the Republic. By spending almost every moment of daylight on official business, denying himself more than the merest minimum of sleep and food, he had put every department of the government sufficiently in order to feel assured of their smooth and effective operation. His troops were now all outside the City, comfortably camped, well supplied and content; the City was orderly and its life had resumed its normal aspect and activities. He felt free to win the regard of the populace by magnificent exhibitions in the amphitheater, on the occasion of the eight days of the Games of Apollo, beginning the day before the Nones of July.

Early next day Narcissus and I were haled from our cell and led, by passages only too well known to me since my service in the Choragium, to the iron-gated doorway from which condemned criminals were thrust out into the arena for the lions or other beasts to tear. From inside that doorway I could look across the sand of the arena and could see not only the herald on his tiny platform, elevated above the

leap of the most agile panther, not only the arena-wall opposite me, but also the faces of the senators in their private boxes on the *podium*, even a portion of the nobility behind them and of the populace higher up and further back.

The day was hot, still and clear, and the July sunshine, still slant in the early morning, struck under the awning and long shafts of the mellow radiance brightened the sand.

From that doorway, craning over the heads of the wretches in front of me, I caught glimpses of the fury of several beasts as they vented their ferocity upon some ordinary criminals and assuaged their ravenous hunger on their blood and flesh.

My time was not far off, yet I still hoped against hope that Agathemer might, even yet, have caught the thieving murderers and would intervene before it was too late. I did not at all fear the beasts; I knew that no bear, panther, leopard, tiger or lion would hurt me, but I felt certain that, when the beasts left me unharmed, I should be recognized as Festus the Beast-Wizard: and then, as the scrutiny of the whole audience would be riveted on me, identified as Andivius Hedulio.

Narcissus was led out, stepping jauntily between his guards, treading springily, with no sign of panic or dejection, a pattern Hercules, naked save for a loin-cloth, his skin pink and fresh, in spite of his days in a dungeon, his mighty muscles rippling all over his huge form. The herald proclaimed to all that this was Narcissus, professional wrestler, for long the crony of Commodus, who had strangled his master and was to be punished for his treachery and crime by being torn to pieces in sight of all Rome.

They let out on him a full-grown, young Mauretanian lion, starved and ravenous. Narcissus was naked and empty-handed, his close-clipped hair, standing like the bristles of a brush, yellow as gold wire, shining in the sun. He stood almost as immobile as had Palus and faced the lion, which, after a bound or two towards him, flattened down on the sand and began to crawl nearer, preparing for a spring.

When it sprang Narcissus performed one of the most miraculous feats ever beheld in the amphitheater. He did

not dodge but ducked slightly, the wide-spread, taloned paws missing his head on each side. His arms shot out as the lion sprang, and, though the brute came at him through the air like a log-arrow from a catapult, his hands gripped each side of the wide-open mouth and his thumbs pushed the inner corners of the lips between the parted upper and lower cheek-teeth. Therefore to close his jaws on his victim the lion had to crush a roll or fold of his own lips. This incredibly difficult feat prolonged his life a few breaths. The whole populace howled in ecstasy at the wretch's coolness, courage, strength, swiftness and adroitness.

The lion's momentum and weight bore Narcissus to the ground, but his thumbs did not slip nor his hold loosen. On the sand lion and man rolled and wrestled, for a brief time. Then the lion, lashing out with his hind legs, caught with the claws of one the wrestler's belly and half disemboweled him. Narcissus collapsed and the great fangs met in his throat.

The populace redoubled their yells.

When silence fell, after the lion had been chased back into his cage and the cage lowered down the lift-shaft, after the mangled corpse of Narcissus had been dragged away and sand sprinkled to hide the red patches where his blood had soaked it, I was haled forth and stood in the very center of the arena. From his perch the herald proclaimed that I was Phorbas, the slave of Pompeianus Falco of Carthage and Rome, who had plotted his master's death in order sooner to gain freedom from his testament, and had himself dealt Falco his deathblow. The populace jeered and booed at me.

I had, as Festus the Animal-Tender, often viewed the interior of the Colosseum from the arena. But never when I was myself the cynosure of all eyes. There I stood, naked except for a loin-cloth, empty-handed, my shoulder-brand and scarred back visible to half the spectators, glared at and reviled. From my viewpoint the spectacle was singularly magnificent: the dark blue sky overhead, varied by some large, solid-looking, white clouds; the fluttering banners waving from the awning poles; the particolored, sagging awn-

ing, shading half the audience; the beauty of the upper colonnade under the awning; the solidly packed throng of spectators which crowded the colonnade, the aisles, the steps and every seat in the hollow of the amphitheater; the dignified ease of the nobility in their spaced chairs, of the senators in their ample armchairs; the gorgeousness of the Imperial Pavilion, filled with a retinue brilliant in blue and silver, in green and gold, in white and crimson, about the hard, spare, soldierly figure on the throne.

I was the only human being on the sand, eyed by all onlookers.

From a door in the *podium*-wall a famished lion was loosed at me. He bounded towards me, roaring; but, three or four lengths from me he paused, stood still regarding me, circled about me and then turned his back on me and loped off to the arena-wall, along which he rounded the arena, apparently searching for a way out. The populace, at first mute with astonishment, voiced their amazement in yells of a notably different quality from those they had uttered while watching Narcissus.

Another lion behaved similarly, except that he, after inspecting me, merely walked in circles far out in the arena, ignoring me as if I were not there at all.

They loosed on me five more lions, four tigers, four leopards, four panthers and four bears, of the fierce Alpine breed. Some of these animals delighted the populace by attacking each other and affording entertainment by savage and ferocious fighting. But not one showed any disposition to attack me.

As beast after beast approached me, conned me and spared me, the upper tiers began to call:

"He is innocent."

"He is guiltless."

"The beasts know."

"He is not guilty."

"The gods declare him clean of guilt!" and other such cries.

Also they began to show signs of being restless and bored. Some yelled for another criminal.

A seventh lion was loosed at me. He paused like the others and eyed me; then he strolled up to me, snuffed at me, and rubbed his mane against my hip, emitting a rumbling purr. I laid my hand on his mane.

Instantly, from all sides at once, rang out cries of,

"Festus!"

"Festus the Beast-Wizard!"

"He's no Phorbas, he's Festus come back!"

I was not far from the Imperial Pavilion and one of the retinue leaned over the *podium*-coping and called to me. I walked towards him. When I was within earshot he called in Greek:

"The King commands that you lead the beasts back to their cages."

Elated and hoping for a reprieve, for vindication, for life, for rehabilitation, for Imperial favor, I led beast after beast back to its cage on a shaft-lift, or to a door in the wall. When the last one was caged an officer of the Imperial retinue, a frontiersman only lately come to Rome, stepped out of one of the postern doors, two arena-slaves with him. They led me to the center of the arena, trussed my hands behind me, bound my ankles and wrapped round my head an evil-smelling old quilt, probably taken from the cot of some arena-slave housed in some cell under the hollow of the amphitheater. Half suffocated by it, unable to shake it off, for they tied it fast, I stood there, blind, realizing that the Emperor still believed me guilty, was inexorable and meant me to be torn to pieces then and there; believing, as I did, that my immunity from attack was due to the effect of my gaze on the beasts I made mild.

Now you, who read, know that I was not devoured. But I had no shred of hope left. I thought that my end had come. I anticipated only the agony of great fangs rending my flesh.

I felt only the hot breath of a beast snuffing at my legs.

Perhaps I fainted. Certainly my next sensation was of lying on the sand, with several unseen animals growling near me and one or more snuffing at my feet and legs.

The amphitheater was quiet, even hushed.

Then, suddenly, a lion uttered a full-throated, coughing roar, jagged and rumbling. When it died away a universal yell arose from the populace. I heard cries of:

"He is innocent!"

"Set him free!"

"We behold the justice of the gods!"

"This proves him guiltless!"

"Festus or Phorbas, he is not guilty!"

And other such exclamations.

Ridiculously, what passed through my mind, besides disgust at the foul odor of the quilt about my head, was the thought that, if I had known that ferocious beasts would avoid me even when they could not see my gaze, I should, on that unforgettable moonlit evening in Sabinum, have gone off home to my cottage, to Septima, and have missed my encounter with Vedia, and our night in her traveling coach.

Then I heard the voices of the animal-tenders essaying, with their long-handled tridents, to chase back into their cages the beasts loose about me.

Soon someone cut my ankle-thongs and the cords about the quilt, also my arm-thongs. The quilt was twitched from my face and I was assisted to my feet. The amphitheater was full of the yells of the populace, affirming my innocence and the manifest intervention of the gods in my behalf. I rolled my gaze around the audience and sought to interpret the demeanor of the Imperial retinue.

Then, as I gazed at the Emperor, too far off for me to make out his expression, the yells altered their quality.

I turned round.

I saw, running towards me across the sand, Agathemer!

Behind him was an official in the robes of a magistrate!

Behind him six more human shapes, four lictors convoying two bound prisoners.

Agathemer embraced me and I him.

"Saved," he breathed, "we've got 'em and most of the loot. Enough to convict 'em and clear you!"

As we loosed our embrace I looked at the approaching magistrate.

He was Flavius Clemens!

Before the shock of recognizing him had passed I forgot him entirely.

For I had recognized the two prisoners.

Though I had seen them but once and that by moonlight, and that eight years before, I recognized the two drunken robbers who had helped us to our couriers' equipment and sent us off galloping to Marseilles.

Indubitably they were Carex and Junco!

While still numb with amazement I felt upon me the cold gaze of Flavius Clemens. I looked him full in the face. He was no less astonished than I and I could read in his expression both amazement and suspicion. I was acutely aware that Ravillanus, by having my hair and beard clipped, had made me readily recognizable to anyone and everyone who had known me in the days of my prosperity. I was even more acutely aware of the keen intuition which every lover feels toward any actual or potential rival. I dreaded that Clemens not only recognized me for myself, but had a glimmering inkling as to why his suit of Vedia had twice failed. But he said nothing except:

"You are cleared of every imputation in connection with the murder of Pompeianus Falco. You are free to go where you please."

Agathemer took off his robe, and threw it around me and led me to a postern. In the vaulted corridor we were met by Tanno, who embraced me and congratulated me, and Valen, who also embraced me and felicitated me. Tanno said:

"Vedia kept up till Agathemer nabbed the criminals, then she fainted; but she declares the faint relieved her and that she is entirely herself."

In one of the cells under the hollow of the amphitheater I was given strong wine, all I wanted, and then washed with

warm water already prepared for me, and afterwards thoroughly massaged. Then I was clad in garments of my own.

"I feel like myself," I remarked.

Just then Flavius Clemens entered, his expression entirely too intelligible for me. Looking me full in the eyes he said:

"You have been passing as an art-amateur of Greek ancestry, under the name of Phorbas, with the status of a slave. Before that you were among the helpers at the Choragium, held as a slave belonging to the *fiscus,* by the name of Festus. It seems to me that you are no Greek, nor of Greek blood, even to the smallest degree. I take you for a full-blooded Roman. I think I recognize you. Are you not Andivius Hedulio?"

"I am," I acknowledged.

He saluted me courteously and bade me a polite farewell, without any other word.

Tanno and Galen made no comment, nor did Agathemer. They assisted me out to Tanno's waiting litter. In it I was borne off to the lodgings which I had occupied eight days before, between my two trials. There I found a tempting meal ready for me and ate liberally. Then I was put to bed and at once fell into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion and slept through till long after daylight next day.

When I woke I found that Dromo himself was by my bedside, as well as Agathemer. They tended me, washed me, plied me with wine and fed me with dainties, asserting that Galen had given orders that I was on no account to stir from my bed or sit up in it.

I slept again and, when I woke early in the afternoon, insisted on getting up and being dressed. I was no sooner clad than there entered the apartment a big, florid, youthful Pannonian sergeant and four legionaries.

I was yet again rearrested!

They led me away, forbidding Agathemer to exchange a word with me, or to follow us. Through the brilliant July sunlight, to the Great Forum, they led me, along its northeast flank, up the Steps of Groaning, and to the Mamertine Prison!

There I was handed over to four of the assistants to the

Public Executioner. They stripped me of my outer garments, leaving me naked except for my tunic. Then they haled me to the trap-door, lifted the trap, passed ropes under my armpits and lowered me into the dreaded lower dungeon, the horrible Tullianum!

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE TULLIANUM

GLOOMY as is the upper cell of the Mamertine Prison there is light enough there for my eyes to have been utterly blinded by it as I was lowered into the black pit beneath. I saw nothing in the brief period while I was being let down, while the ropes were being drawn up, while the trap-door was shut down and fitted into place. Then I was in the pitchest darkness, into which no ray, no glimmer of light could penetrate. I saw nothing whatever, yet I seemed to feel a presence, seemed to hear a faint footfall, seemed to be aware of another human being standing close to me. Then I heard a deep, resonant, healthy, pleasant-sounding voice ask:

"Brother in misfortune, who are you?"

I was past any impulse towards dissimulation or any belief in its utility.

"I am Andivius Hedulio."

"You are?" the big, cheerful male voice exclaimed. "You really are? You amaze me! I am Galvius Crispinillus, lately and for many a year King of the Highwaymen! Give me your hand!"

Now, whatever distaste I felt for giving my hand to such a criminal, however great was my repugnance, however utterly I felt myself lost, however certain I was of the inevitable doom hanging over me, however short a respite I anticipated before my inescapable death, I was not fool enough to antagonize my companion in misery, presumably a powerful and

ferocious brute. I held out my hand. His grasped it. Mine returned the grip.

"Come this way!" he said. "This pit is damp and chilly, but even here a bed of stale straw is better than the rock floor or the patches of mud on it or the heaps of filth. I know every inch of this hole and I know the least uncomfortable place to sit. Come along!"

He guided me in the utter blackness to a pile of damp straw. On it we sat down, half reclining.

"If you are thirsty," he said, "I can guide you to the well. There is a spring in here and plenty of good water."

"I thank you," I said. "I shall be thirsty enough before long. Just now I am far more interested to hear how you came here. Nobody believed that you would ever be caught."

"No more did I!" he ejaculated. "I had so easily defied the utmost efforts of the government and officials under Aurelius, of the incompetents under Commodus, of his vaunted Highway Constabulary; had so prospered, had so come and gone as I pleased and robbed whom I pleased from the Po to the Straits, that I thought no man could lay for me any snare I could not foresee, thought myself impeccably wary and prescient, though I had always taken and would always take all necessary precautions.

"But I was a fool. I comprehended Aurelius and Commodus and their magistrates and officials and constabulary; I was right in fearing nothing from Pertinax and Julianus; but I was an ass to think I could cope with Septimius Severus. That man is deeper than the deepest abyss of mid-ocean!

"I thought I was certain of months of disorder, confusion and laxity in which I could go where I pleased, act as I pleased, garner a rich harvest and escape unscathed. Do you know, before he had left Aquileia, perhaps before he had passed the Alps, possibly before he had set out from Sabaria, that man had despatched not one but a dozen detachments to ascertain my whereabouts, consider how best to take me unawares, lie in wait for me, nab me and hunt down my bands. I believe he had thought out, far back in that head

of his, long before Pertinax was murdered, perhaps even long before Commodus died, every measure he would initiate if he became Emperor, down to the smallest detail. He had all his plans framed and thought out, I'll wager!

"His emissaries were no fools! They, first among those despatched against me, knew their business. I was trapped near Sentinum, on the Kalends of this month. Never mind how; even in this plight I'm ashamed of it. They just missed nabbing Felix Bulla along with me. But he got away that time. And I prophesy that now he is warned of his danger and knows the cleverness of the men on his trail, he'll show himself yet cleverer. He is a marvel, is Felix Bulla, and promises to outdo even my record."

He broke off, breathing audibly.

"By the way," he went on, "are you hungry? I have part of a loaf of bread in here, not yet stale and no damper than it must get in this foul air. It hasn't fallen on the floor. It's eatable."

"I'll be hungry enough before long," I replied, "but I am not hungry now. I had eaten all I wanted and of the best just before I was haled here."

"Speak when you want any," he said. "It will be share and share alike here for us till they come to finish us.

"And now, tell me about yourself. I have always been curious about you. I heard all about you when you first got into trouble and I was told that the official report of your death was fictitious, invented by underlings too clumsy to capture you and fearful of the consequences of their incompetence. Also I heard unimpeachable testimony that you were alive later and had been seen in Rome with Maternus and outside Rome, the next summer, with the mutineers from Britain. I have often wondered how you got into such company. Tell me how you came to be with Maternus."

I saw no utility in any further dissimulation of anything or in any reticence; I began with our springtime stay at the farm in the mountains, and told my story in detail, from that hour.

When I came to my visit, along with Maternus, to the

Temple of Mercury and mentioned how Maternus had warned me that we were being watched, and how I had shot one glance towards the watchers and had recognized one of them, he interrupted me and, without enquiring where I had seen him before, asked for a description of the watcher I had recognized. I gave it as well as I could and he said:

"That was my brother, Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, now dead. It was he who told me that he had seen you with Maternus. Go on."

Again, when I spoke of recognizing Crispinillus by the wayside as I passed with the mutineers he interjected:

"Yes, he told me he saw you there."

And later, when I spoke of being found with Agathemer after the massacre, separated from him and led off to the *ergastulum* at Nuceria he remarked:

"I can't conceive how my brother missed you. Nor could he. He looked for you among the corpses and went over the survivors twice in search of you."

"I did not see him after the massacre," I declared.

"Mercury protected you," was his comment.

When I finished the story of my giving warning of the plot in the *ergastulum* at Nuceria I paused.

"Go on, lad!" he urged. "You have had adventures and you narrate them tellingly."

I hesitated and then, utterly reckless, I blurted out:

"If I am to go on with my story you might as well know right now, that I am not only Andivius Hedulio, but also Felix the Horse-Wrangler."

He swore a great oath.

"Boy!" he cried, "I love you! I have admired you since I listened to Bulla's account of his one failure. At first I was furious at your having spoiled the best plan I ever laid and the most brilliant chance I ever had, at your preventing me from making the biggest haul of booty I ever had hopes of. But, as years passed, my resentment has abated and my admiration has warmed. I bear you no grudge. I have often thought I should like to meet you and find out why on

earth you desired to thwart me and how you managed to do it. Go on! Tell me the rest."

I resumed my tale.

When I came to my outlook from the crag and explained my former acquaintance with Vedia he interrupted.

"Of course, if you knew the lady and she was an old flame of yours, I don't wonder that you intervened to save her. My lads were so rough and fierce-looking that they had a worse reputation than they deserved. When they captured prisoners rich enough to pay any profitable ransom they treated them with the most scrupulous deference. Business is business and we were not brigands for fun, but for profit. Also they all dreaded me and my orders were explicit and emphatic. Your sweetheart would have been as respected with them as in her own home. But, of course, you couldn't feel that way. Go on with your story."

I demurred, asserting that I felt sleepy. He assented and we composed ourselves on the straw. How long I slept or when I wakened I do not know: I was roused by the opening of the trap-door and by the light which entered from above. Food was lowered to us; pork-stew, still warm, in a two-handled, wide-mouthed jug; bread; olives, not wholly spoiled; and a small kidskin of thin, sour wine. Galvius received the dole and safeguarded the containers: the ropes were drawn up, the trap-door reset and we were again in utter darkness.

To my astonishment I felt entirely myself and very hungry. We drank and ate deliberately and again drank. Galvius was a careful husbander of the wine, and we drank mostly water from the spring.

Afterwards, nestled in the not unendurably damp straw, chilly, but not shivering, we sat or lay side by side and he urged me to continue my story. I began where I had left off, and, going into the smallest details, brought my history down to the hour of my consignment to our dungeon.

When I paused he sighed, but not gloomily.

"You have had marvellous adventures," he said, "and mar-

vellous luck, both good and bad. I knew that Marcia had belonged to your uncle. I was informed of the existence of Ducconius Furfur, of his likeness to Commodus, of his presence in the Palace, of his utilization as a dummy Emperor, to set Commodus free to masquerade as Palus, and I heard that he had been your neighbor.

"Now go back, begin your tale at the beginning. Tell me of your getting into trouble at the first, of how you escaped in the first place. I have often wondered how you managed it."

"Give me a respite," I demurred, "my voice is tired. It is your turn to talk. Tell me how you learned about Ducconius Furfur and about Commodus masquerading as Palus and about Marcia."

"Why," he said, "I had friends in one or more towns when I first took to the woods. They gave me tips that helped me to make fine hauls on the highways. As I prospered I made more friends; they helped me and my growing success gained more, till I had friends in every town in Italy and in Rome itself and an organized service of road-messengers. Why, Imperial couriers often carried letters and packets, destined for me, from one town to another, or even carried onward letters from me to distant friends or parcels of my booty.

"In Rome itself I had many agents and chiefly my sister, Galvia Crispinilla, a professional procuress and poisoner, who knew the worst secrets of the lives of all Rome's wealthy and noble debauchees, and our brother, Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, a professional informer and a valued member of the Imperial Secret Service. I never knew why he had a spite against you, but he had and it was false information given by him that caused your proscription and ruin and thrust you into your years of misery. I always felt that you did not deserve what you have suffered, but his grudges were none of my business.

"He is dead, as is Galvia, for she kept poison about her and gave a supply to him and to me to use in case of capture. I was caught without mine, for I was certain that no danger

threatened me. He and she took the poison when they saw capture inevitable, as it will be for most evil-doers all over the Empire under the sway of such a man as Septimius Severus."

He paused and I meditated awhile, puzzling as to how I could have incurred the vindictive rancor of any secret-service agent.

Presently I said:

"Tell me how you came to be King of the Highwaymen."

"My boy," he said, "my case is far different from yours. You had an honorable origin and an honorable past. Nor were any of your adventures discreditable to you, even if some situations you have been in were distressing then and are humiliating to remember. You have nothing to be ashamed of unless it be such a trifling peccadillo as impersonating Salsonius Salinator.

"My origin I shall never disclose, not even to a brother in misfortune. My life has been one long series of perjuries, murders, robberies, debaucheries and ruthless cruelties. I have been deaf to all considerations of decency, pity and mercy; as unmoved by such feelings as will be the savage beasts which spared you but will rend me to shreds. I am at the end of my crimes; let me hide them. My doom is at hand. Why should I defile your ears with the tale of my atrocities? Let them remain untold."

"You slander yourself," I demurred. "You cannot make me believe that a man capable of condoning my balking of your great coup on the Flaminian Highway, capable of guiding me to this bed of straw and of offering me a share of his bit of stale bread can be all bad. There must be much in your past life less dark than you indicate."

He ruminated.

"Frankly," he said, "I cannot recall anything I ever did at which a man like you would not shudder. I have been a good sport, that is why I could not but chuckle, after my first wrath cooled, at your spoiling my great coup, as you call it. But, all my life, I have gloried in my treacheries and cruelties. I have hated all mankind and been merciless

to foes, if they came into my power, and have pretended friendliness I did not feel so as to make use of those who thought me friendly.

"I can well recall only one human being I really loved: my wife. She had her weak points, for she was a despiser of the gods, mocking all religion and addicted to some contemptible Syrian cult of superstition and puerilities. But I loved her in spite of that failing, for, in every other way, she was a paragon. She is dead now and spared the agonies she would have suffered at my capture and fate. Our two daughters are safe; both healthy, both with the full status of citizens of the Republic, both well provided with possessions, each married to a good, reliable husband, though the younger is almost too young to be a wife. I feel at peace about them.

"I really loved my wife and in a way, her two girls. But, except for them, I have cheated, ensnared, robbed and killed without pity or remorse."

"You have no regrets?" I queried.

"No remorse," he corrected me. "I should do it all over again if I were back as I was when I took to brigandage.

"Of course, while my wife was alive and I hoped for an old age with her, I had a dream of investing my savings in a house in some out-of-the-way town and in an estate near it and living at ease on the proceeds of my robberies. But that was always far off in the future; I laid up a hoard to make it possible, but I was never anywhere near ready to make use of that hoard. Now it has been divided between my daughters, for, after their mother's death, I realized that no life but brigandage was possible for me. If I had not been captured I should have gone on as I was, I should go on now, could I escape and resume my old life. I feel no remorse.

"But I confess to one regret. I have, all my life, requited every helper and paid off every grudge. But one benefactor, my greatest benefactor, I have not repaid, although, when I learned of his inestimable service to me, I swore a great oath to requite him, if it ever was in my power. I have

never been able to learn who he was, or even whether he is yet living. If he is, I hate to die without requiting him as he deserves, in so far as I might.

"And I own that I was and am keenly curious to learn who he was. The mere curiosity gnaws at me. Perhaps you understand."

"I do," I said. "I also am extremely curious about a mystery I encountered in the earlier part of my adventures. That memory urges me to comply with your request for the former half of my story."

And, beginning with my uncle's death, I narrated all my earlier adventures. When I told of the cloaked and hatted horseman by the roadside in the rain, the day of the brawl in Vediamnum and the affray near Villa Satronia, he cut in with:

"That was my brother, Marcus. He was detailed to report on your local feud. Whether he knew of you before that, whether his queer spite against you originated then or earlier, I don't know. He took dislikes and likes without any traceable reasons."

Similarly, when I told of seeing Marcus Crispinillus peer through the postern door of Nemestronia's water-garden he interjected some remarks.

He uttered admiring ejaculations as I told of wrestling with the leopard on the terrace at Nemestronia's and of how Agathemer and I crawled through the drain at Villa Andivia, also at my tale of my branding and scourging and of the loyalty of Chryseros Philargyrus.

But, when I came to our discovery of the hut in the mountains, he stirred uneasily in the rustling straw and muttered in his throat. As I described our winter at the hut he became more and more excited, uttering ejaculations, half suppressed at first, as if not to interrupt my narrative, later louder and louder.

When I told of our killing the five ruffians he sprang up.

"Say no more!" he cried. "Come to my arms. Let me embrace you! Let me clasp you close! You are he! You are my benefactor! The man who tells that story in such

detail cannot have heard it from another, he must have lived it! To think that you are Felix the Horse-Master and also Andivius Hedulio and that you saved my Nona! My gratitude cannot be expressed, any more than your service to me can be requited. But I shall do all I can. The gems you took were but a trifle and you were welcome to them. In fact, I never missed them. In any case they were but an installment on what you deserved and now deserve. It is not yet too late for me to save you. I can cause your speedy release and probably your complete rehabilitation. They have been keeping me here in the hope of extorting from me information which would enable them to ferret out my confederates in the towns and cities. They have wheedled and threatened, but have hesitated to torture me, since no one doubts that I was, by origin, a freeman. I have held out and should have held out, even if tortured. Now I'll make a voluntary confession, enough to delight the magistrates. Chiefly I'll emphasize your complete innocence and my brother's malignity. I'll have to save some others along with you and I shall. But, to a certainty, I'll save you!

"It seems to me there is a poplar-pole somewhere in this dungeon."

He felt about and presently I heard a dull thumping, on the trap-door, in a sort of rhythm, like the foot-beating of spectators at Oscan dances. After no long interval the trap-door was lifted; Crispinillus called up:

"Tell them I have changed my mind. I'll confess. I'll make a full confession. I'll tell the whole story!"

The trap-door was replaced and we were again in complete darkness.

He settled himself beside me in the straw.

"No need to husband our provisions now," he said. "Neither of us will be left long in this hole. Let's comfort ourselves with food and wine."

I felt inclined the same way and we munched and passed the kidskin back and forth.

"Tell me," I said, "how it was that your thumping brought such a quick response."

"I signalled in the code of knocking known to all jailers," he said.

I expressed my amazement and incredulity.

"Don't you fool yourself," he said. "There is a certain sort of mutual understanding between executioners and jailers on the one hand and criminals on the other. There must be a give and take in all trades, even between man-hunters and hunted men. They were on the watch for any signal I might give, if it really meant anything. They were pleased to hear. You'll see the results promptly."

In fact, after no long interval, the trap-door was lifted again and a rope lowered, up which Crispinillus was bidden to climb.

He embraced me time after time, saying that we should never set eyes on each other again and that, confession or no confession, he knew his doom was not far off; but he wanted me, as long as I lived, to remember the gratitude of Nona's husband, his thankfulness for my treatment of his family and his efforts to requite the service.

"Keep up a good heart, lad," he said. "You won't be long here alone in the dark, and you'll soon be as coddled and pampered as a man can be. Long life to you and good luck and may you be soon married and raise a fine family. Peace of mind and prosperity to you and yours and a green old age to you!"

And he climbed the rope, hand over hand, like the best sailor on Libo's yacht.

CHAPTER XL

SEVERUS

NOT many hours later, I, sleeping soundly in the straw, was wakened by the raising of the trap-door. Again a rope was let down. This time two of the Executioner's helpers slid down the dangling rope. They addressed me

most deferentially and asked permission to prepare me to be hauled up, thereupon adjusting the ropes about me.

In the upper chamber of the prison I was rubbed down and clothed in the best sort of tunic, shod with the ceremonial boots of a nobleman and wrapped in a nobleman's outer garments. Then I was led off to the nearest point to which a litter may approach the Mamertine Prison. The brilliant sunrays blinded me and the sight of Rome in the glory of a mellow July afternoon brought the tears to my eyes and made me gulp and swallow. But the tears did not blind me too much to recognize Imperial liveries on the litter-bearers and runners and intendant. I was obsequiously invited to enter the litter, the panels were slid, the curtains drawn, and the bearers set off. They carried me to the Palace!

There I was received by the new Chamberlain in person, to be sure with four armed guardsmen accompanying him, but himself as deferential as possible. By him I was conducted to a luxurious apartment, consisting of a large anteroom, a private library, a private *triclinium*, a private bathroom, and two bedrooms, all furnished with the most lavish abundance and in perfect taste.

I found a small regiment of servants to minister to my wants: a valet, a masseur, a cook, waiters, errand-pages, a reader and yet others. I could have anything I asked for in that apartment, but a guard at its outer door saw to it that I remained in it.

There I was bathed, massaged, obsequiously asked what dainties and wines I preferred, supplied with all I suggested and clothed in garments to my liking; huge heaps of togas, mantles, wraps, tunics and shoes being brought in for me to choose from. There I spent some comfortable days, sleeping much, having myself read to, mostly from the private letters of the Emperors, and from the Anticatones of the Divine Julius; and, from the balcony of the ante-room enjoying the splendid view southwestwards, over the Circus Maximus, the lower reaches of the Tiber and the Campagna, for my apartment was on that side of the Palace and high up.

When I asked if I might despatch letters to my friends I was told that the Emperor had given orders that I was to communicate with no one and no one with me. I worried over Vedia's anxiety and almost as much over the probable disquiet of Agathemer, Tanno and even of Galen. But I was helpless and endeavored to be calm. I was certainly comfortable and hopeful, though impatient.

At last, after six days of this luxurious imprisonment, on the day before the Ides of July, sometime before noon, my apartment was entered by Juvenalis himself in the full regalia of Prefect of the Palace. He greeted me deferentially and was most respectful. He informed me that the Emperor desired an interview with me and through him conveyed to me his regrets that it had had to be postponed so long and that I had been so long kept in confinement and seclusion. He had now come to conduct me to the Emperor, who was at last free to spend with me an hour or more. When my valet had made me comfortable and had prepared me for my private audience, Juvenalis escorted me to the upper private audience-hall, a chamber spacious and magnificent, though somewhat smaller than the lower private audience-hall and far smaller than the great hall for public audiences or the vast throne-room.

I followed Juvenalis along the corridors, elated by my nobleman's attire, but nervous at the prospect of coming face to face with the master of Rome and Italy, with the prospective (as he turned out to be in fact) master of the world.

I was ushered in and Juvenalis withdrew, shutting the door and leaving me alone with the great man. He rose from his chair, for it could not be called a throne, took a step or two towards me and greeted me affably, as one nobleman another. He bade me be seated, did not sit down himself until I had taken the chair he indicated; then he settled himself deliberately.

We eyed each other, in silence. I cannot conjecture what he thought of me, but I can never forget the impression made on me by him.

He wore the Imperial robes consciously. I had often noted how Commodus wore his without thought, as any fisherman wears his rags. Severus was aware of his regalia, and especially of the sky-blue shoes with the Imperial Eagles embroidered on them in gold thread. He looked a man in the best of health, completely fit for a frontier command, for open campaigning, full of surplus energy, hard-muscled, spare and enduring. Also he looked as competent, discerning, clear-headed and ruthless as a man could be. Most of all I diagnosed him as economical of himself, of his men and of his possessions, especially of cash; as swayed by self-interest alone, as flinty-hearted; yet as capable of kindliness when it did not interfere with his plans and was not too expensive.

I waited in silence for him to speak. He said:

"I am a very busy man, even far too busy. Commodus left the treasury empty and every department of the government inefficient. Pertinax refilled the treasury, but his attempts at reorganization merely disorganized everything and prepared for the general confusion which came about under Julianus. With insufficient funds I must fill the Treasury, reorganize the whole governmental machinery, get it to working dependably and smoothly, and at the same time prepare for a civil war which I hope to win, but of which I can foretell the outcome no better than could the Divine Julius be sure of the outcome of his when he crossed the Rubicon. Amid all these cares and occupations I must keep fit and must do all I can to win the confidence and respect of all classes by rectifying, as far as I may, the consequences of the inattention of my predecessors and of the knavery and venality of their subordinates. And I must hurry off to deal with Pescennius Niger, who is no mean antagonist. Altogether I have no time for trifles.

"But I do not reckon your case as a trifle, though the safety of the Republic by no means hinges on it. And I am more interested in you than in any one individual outside of my family and connections. I have never heard of a man brought so near death, so ruined, but for the singular favor of the gods so utterly and so hopelessly ruined, subjected to

such dangers and miseries, so baselessly, by such malevolent misrepresentations and fabrications. You deserve to be recompensed. You shall be. And besides the merits of your case I am curious about you.

"You must be curious yourself.

"When I foresaw that I was likely to be acclaimed Emperor by my soldiers and welcomed by the Senate as Prince of the Republic, I set on foot various measures certain to benefit the Commonwealth and the Empire. Especially I made an effort to abolish or at least curb the banditry, brigandage and outlawry which corrupts the entire rural population of Italy and is a national disgrace. I was successful in so far as that my emissaries broke up most of the bands of outlaws and captured many of them, particularly the most famous of all, known as the King of the Highwaymen.

"I had made sure to have secret agents [illegible] all my emissaries, on whatever errand I had sent them. These secret agents reported that powerful [illegible] were [illegible] to bring about the escape of this arch-criminal. I set reliable men to find out what those influences were. Their investigations led straight to Marcus Salvius Crispinilla, a life-long member of the Imperial secret service, universally known as a professional informer, yet considered second to no man in the secret service as to usefulness and reliability, the only man among the spies of Commodus who had been trusted and retained by Pertinax and Julianus, the very man whom my relations in Rome, who had kept me posted as to conditions here, had represented as most likely to be dependable and serviceable. I ordered him apprehended but he and his despicable sister, Galvia Crispinilla, escaped arrest by taking some of her poison. Their papers were seized, but so huge was the mass of them and so great their confusion that they could not be put in order and their secrets utilized at once. So sluggishly did their unravelling proceed that, although it was manifest at once that the precious pair had been agents in Rome for the King of the Highwaymen, had marketed for him his booty, had kept up an almost daily correspondence with him, had warned him of all facts and

rumors likely to affect him, had maintained a highly organized and cleverly concealed system of secret agents and road-messengers for his benefit and theirs; yet, until his voluntary confession, neither I nor anyone else concerned had the slightest inkling that the King of the Highwaymen was named Caius Galvius Crispinillus and was a full brother to the procuress and poisoner and the professional spy, who had committed suicide to escape retribution for their villainies. Until his confession was brought to my attention I had equally no inkling that all relevant aspersions upon you had originated with or been transmitted by Marcus Galvius Crispinillus.

"The case against you, on the basis of the papers filed at Secret Service Headquarters, was most damnatory. You were represented to have been the man who had suggested to Egnatius Capito the formation of his conspiracy against Commodus, and to have planned for him the inclusion in it of [illegible] survivors of the members of Lucilla's abortive conspiracy of the year before; to have offered yourself as the most likely man to succeed in assassinating Commodus, as he held you in high regard for some exploit in some roadside affray in Sabinum; to have pretended illness as a cloak for your machinations. Then it was represented, circumstantially, that, after the detection and foiling of Capito's conspiracy, you had taken ship for Spain, made your way to the camp of the rebel, Maternus, won his confidence, suggested to him the idea of a secret march on Rome, of the assassination of Commodus during the Festival of Cybele, planned for him the details of that secret march, managed it for him and come all the way from Spain to Rome with him.

"When his attempt failed, you, alone among his henchmen, escaped. You then, according to the reports, went straight to Britain, visited every important camp, infused into the garrisons the spirit of discontent, engineered their mutiny, suggested to them the sending of a dangerously large deputation to Rome, led that deputation and were its controlling spirit all the way to Rome, vanishing successfully when the

mutineers were induced by Cleander to return to Britain and their associates, by his device, were massacred or consigned to *ergastula.*

"With such reports in my hands, with additions declaring that while neither your presence nor your influence could be proved, you were probably the guiding spirit in the assassination of Pertinax, it is no wonder that I, crediting these apparently sincere and trustworthy statements, considered you the most dangerous among all the survivors of conspiracies against my predecessors, which conspirators, on principle, I meant to exterminate as an obvious measure of mere sensible precaution.

"No one seems to have recognized you as Andivius Hedulio while you were in the service of Pompeianus Falco under the name of Phorbas, except only Galen, who has explained and justified to me his reasons for protecting you, of which I entirely approve. He did well. As Phorbas I heard of you first, when it was represented to me that you had murdered your late master and been cleared by that indulgent humanitarian, Lollius Corbulo; that the case was a most flagrant miscarriage of justice and that such slackness would breed a crop of such murders unless temptation was counteracted by severity. I then directed Cassius Ravillanus to deal with you, for I trusted him.

"When, in the arena of the Colosseum, I saw the savage, ravening beasts not only spare you but fawn on you, I felt sure that you had been falsely convicted, that you were innocent and that the gods had intervened to save you. Later, when I heard the cries of 'Festus' and they were explained to me, I was doubly incensed against you. That no beast would touch you, even when bound and your face covered, convinced me of your complete innocence.

"Thereupon, after I had ordered you released, I had turned my attention again to the spectacle of the games in the arena, promising myself an interview with you later, for I was intensely curious about you. But, that very day, before dark, Flavius Clemens craved a brief private audience with me and informed me that he had recognized you as Andivius

Hedulio and that you had confessed your identity. I ordered you at once into the Tullianum, pending my decision as to how to wring from you a complete disclosure of your villainies and accomplices before putting you to death.

"Then, to my amazement, the confession of the King of the Highwaymen represented you as a wholly innocent man, incredibly slandered and calumniated, and all by Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, why and for what end was unknown.

"I at once ordered you released and brought to the Palace. Here I have kept you in unmerited confinement until the papers of your traducer could be sifted and I could go over those relevant to your case. Manifestly you never had anything to do with inciting any conspiracy or any march on Rome. All aspersions on you were invented by Crispinillus. I am inexpressibly curious about you. I want you to tell me your story in your own way, in detail, taking your time. In particular I want to learn how you came to be with Maternus and later with the mutineers from Britain. I am at leisure to harken."

He had put me entirely at my ease. Manifestly he wanted to hear my story, was in the mood to listen, and rather enjoyed the respite from care which this carefully arranged interval of leisure gave him. I felt emboldened and began with an explanation of the feud between the Satronians and the Vedians, of the lawsuit between Ducconius Furfur and my uncle, and of his purchase of Marcia from Ummidius Quadratus and his manumission of her.

After these preliminaries I launched into my story. He listened attentively and with every indication of lively interest, with few interruptions. Once he clapped for his pages and had in snow-cooled wine to refresh me and soothe my throat. Upon my account of my wrestle with Nemestronia's leopard he cut in with a series of questions as to my power over animals. When I came to my encounter with Pescennius Niger he was keenly interested, as in my report of his reputation in Marseilles, according to Doris, and uttered one or two remarks. Otherwise he was apparently absorbed in my narrative.

When it was over he said:

"I believe you, your story sounds true; all of it. You have had amazing adventures and have escaped alive manifestly by the special favor of the immortal gods, particularly of Mercury. Like you, I pay special attention to winning and keeping the favor of Mercury, though, of course, for me, as for all soldiers, Mithras is the most important god.

"You may be very sure that I shall, as far as may be, provide that no informer or secret-service agent can ever again succeed in gaining credence for baseless fabrications, such as those from which you have suffered. I shall endeavor to have it arranged that reports of any one agent be checked up by reports of another, the two being wholly unknown to each other. Thus no man shall, if I can prevent it, again be persecuted as you have been. I am shocked at such laxity and I shudder at the power wielded by Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, and at his misuse of it. I can find no trace of any reasonable motive; he seems to have slandered you from mere whim or the mere love of causing misery, or some spite or perhaps to increase the impression of his own importance.

"Now there looms before me the duty of seeing you restored to your rights, as to both rank and property.

"In respect to your standing as a Roman nobleman there has been, is and will be no difficulty. I have had everything attended to and all necessary formalities have been gone through, all official, public records made. You are a Roman nobleman in good standing with every right which your birth assured you.

"As to your property matters are not so simple. I find that you will be very wealthy, anyhow, as the heir of one-fourth of the estate of your late master, Pompeianus Falco, and also as inheritor of his marvellous collection of gems and curios, therefore, even without anything of your confiscated property, you will be affluent.

"But that does not absolve me from the duty of seeing justice done you; of putting you in possession of your house here in Rome and of your estates in Sabinum, and in Bruttium. I find that all these were held by the *fiscus* until

after the death of Cleander. Owing to the destruction of a large part of the Palace records in the great fire I cannot make sure whether what I am told is true. I am told that your town house and country estates were granted by the *fiscus,* under proper seal, ostensibly by the command of Commodus, to the present owner. That present owner is in possession of the official transfer deeds and they are properly made out. Yet neither from the present owner nor from the deeds can it be ascertained which Prefect of the Palace authorized the transfer. Between Cleander and Aemilius Lætus, Commodus had thirty different Prefects of the Palace, most of them for very brief terms, one for less than a full day, for he was appointed after noon one day and put to death before noon of the day following. To a certainty, I cannot ever get legal proof that the grant was gotten by bribery or was in any way illegal.

"Therefore I cannot command the present holder to return your former property to the *fiscus,* in order that the *fiscus* may turn it over to you. Nor is there any precedent for one Prince revoking a grant made under a predecessor. Nor is there anything in our law or customs enabling me to bid the present holder to sell back to the *fiscus* your entire former property, even at a high valuation.

"Moreover I do not feel that I ought, unless I must, take from the treasury the cash necessary to repurchase your house and estates, so as to be able to restore you to full possession of them; or to hand you a sum in cash sufficient to recompense you for the confiscation of your heritage.

"Yet, whatever straits the treasury may be in, I pledge you my word that, if you cannot recover full possession of your estates in any other way, I shall compel the present holder to release them to the *fiscus* and shall order the *fiscus* to restore them to you, I, out of our depleted treasury, paying the present holder, but I do not want to resort to this unless all other means fail.

"Hoping that the matter may be adjusted in another way, easier for all three of us, I have arranged to have the present holder of your former estates here in the Palace.

When this interview between you and me terminates, I shall have you escorted to a room where you will find awaiting you the present holder of your former estates. If you two cannot come to some agreement by which, with full satisfaction to both of you, you become again possessed of your patrimony, I shall then take the measures to which I have pledged myself.

"To that end I have given orders that, if you formally make request for a second private audience with me, you shall have it, although I must leave Rome for the East within eight days and cannot despatch the imperative business awaiting me, even if I could go without food, rest or sleep. I mean what I say, you are to ask for a second audience if you really want one and if you ask for one you shall have it. But do not ask for it unless you must.

"And now, is there anything else you desire to say, or to request or any query you wish to put to me? If so, I authorize and command you to speak."

Choking, I muttered that I had nothing further to say.

"In that case," said the Emperor, standing up, "this interview is at an end. You shall be conducted to your conference with the present owner of your former estates, which I hope may turn out to your full satisfaction."

And he clapped his hands for a page.

The page conducted me through endless corridors, twisting and turning. During that brief interval I did a great deal of very confused thinking. I was dazed and puzzled. I had realized as he ended his harangue that it would have been ridiculous to ask that man to change his mind or even modify a decision. He was not that sort of Emperor. Yet he had pledged himself to restore to me my estates or recompense me in cash. I felt that he meant it; yet I knew that he would never have uttered that pledge if he had felt that there was the remotest chance of his ever being called on to fulfill it. He was too parsimonious to promise such generosity unless absolutely certain that the occasion for it would never confront him. Yet how could he escape it and why did he feel so sure? How could any beneficiary from such a grant

of confiscated property be induced to disgorge except by Imperial order and that with full compensation? Why had Severus so sedulously, yet so obviously, avoided naming the present holder of my former property? The Emperor was an austere man, stern by habit, almost grim by nature, certainly serious. He had spoken seriously. Yet I sensed a jest somewhere in the background of his thoughts. I almost believed I had caught the glint of a twinkle in his hard, gray eyes. Could I be wrong? Could I be right?

It seemed like a jest to send me to an interview with a beneficiary of a grant of confiscated property, enriched thereby, and to imply, even to suggest, that he might be induced to restore to me his acquisitions, without pressure, merely by amicable converse. I conjured up before me the probable appearance of the man I was to meet; perhaps gross and greedy like Satronius Satro, perhaps dwarfish and mean like Vedius Vedianus, probably like anyone of the avaricious magnates, associated with Pullanius, whom I had met while impersonating Salsonius Salinator.

I resented the possibility of an Imperial jest. I was more and more dazed and puzzled the nearer I approached the inevitable interview and the nearer I approached it the more futile and hopeless it seemed and the more despondent I grew.

The page paused at a door, opened it, waved me in and shut it.

I was in a small parlor, and there was no other man in it; I saw only one seated human figure, a woman, a lady, a graceful young woman, a charming young woman.

Then, suddenly, I saw through it all.

My troubles were indeed at an end.

I recognized Vedia!

EPILOGUE

I DO not think it necessary to describe in detail my marriage to Vedia, nor our dinners at Nemestronia's, at Tanno's, at Segontius Almo's; nor the dinners we gave at my old home, after it had been fitted up to our liking, all trace of its occupancy by tenants effaced and we had settled there.

Why tell at length of my manumission of Agathemer, of my endowment of him with a goodly share of my heritage from poor Falco, or of his disposition of Falco's gems and his rapid acquisition of vast wealth and of his continued prosperity?

When my misfortunes began Nemestronia was past her eighty-fourth birthday. After my rehabilitation Vedia and I helped at the celebration of her ninety-fifth, and of three more.

Nemestronia lived almost to her hundredth birthday, in full possession of her faculties and, until near the end, in marvellously good health. She is still remembered as having been the oldest noble matron ever known in Rome.

Like her, Chryseros Philargyrus, though long past the usual term of human life when my disasters overtook us, survived my nine winters of adventures and lived to greet me as a son rearisen from the dead, in the tenth summer after he had sped me on my way in the midnight woods from Duconius Furfur's land.

Enough to say that Vedia and I, from a second-floor balcony, watched pass the triumphal procession of our great Prince of the Republic, Septimius Severus, when he returned victorious over both his rivals and reëntered Rome, indubitably master of the world.

As to my later life I cannot forbear remarking that I am

the only man with pierced ears who ever mingled as an equal with the bathers in the Baths of Titus, the only man, certainly, with a brand mark on his shoulder and scourge-scars on his back who ever habitually frequented that most magnificent of our fashionable pleasure-resorts. My brand-marks and scourge-scars have not diminished my enjoyment of life except that they frequently give bores a pretext for insisting on my narrating my adventures.

Of course, as in my city mansion, so also at Villa Andivia, I have had constructed and consecrated a handsome private chapel to Mercury.

NOTES TO ANDIVIUS HEDULIO

A. THE ROMAN ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

FROM the expulsion of the Kings, the people of Rome, assembled in their voting-field outside their city, each year elected the magistrates for the year: others, and especially quæstors, answering to our army-paymaster and custom-house collectors; prætors (judges, generals and governors of provinces), and two consuls, acting as chief-magistrates and generals-in-chief. A man was generally first quæstor, later prætor and finally consul, often holding other intermediary offices.

Ex-officials, who had held the more important offices of the Republic, became by immemorial custom life-members of the Senate, which was never an elective, always a selective body, without legal authority but with great influence. As the Republic's Empire spread the Senate was less and less able to control provincial governors, until such self-confident geniuses as Sulla, Cæsar and Augustus became able to control it. The Roman Republic was never abolished, and did not die till the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453. It conquered a great Empire and when its Senate could no longer control the magistrates who managed that Empire, its soldiers who, by conquering and holding provinces to pay taxes maintained the Empire and the Republic, wearied of the incompetence of the Senate's appointees, of the squabbles and strife of their leaders, chose by acclamation one commander whom they loved and trusted. The Senate, at his mercy, legalized his sovereignty by conferring on him for life the powers of a Tribune, an official who could initiate nothing, but had the legal power to forbid anything and everything.

The Senate continued to administer those provinces reckoned safe from invasion or insurrection; always two governed by ex-consuls and about ten governed each by an ex-prætor. It continued to dispose of the funds derived from their taxes and to recruit itself from ex-magistrates and to retain much of its influence, dignity and importance.

The outer provinces and those prone to turbulence were governed not by ex-consuls and ex-prætors acting in the name of the Senate, but each by a deputy of the Emperor, styled proprætor, præses, or procurator. These were called imperial provinces. The magistrates of the senatorial provinces were, under the Empire, no longer elected by the people, but appointd by the Senate, with or without an indication of the Emperor's wishes.

The Romans never devised any method of choosing a chief magistrate other than acclamation by an army and confirmation by the Senate, creating an Emperor. If two commanders at about the same time were separately saluted "Imperator," as were Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger, there was no method of adjudicating their conflicting claims except by Civil War and the survival of one Imperator only.

B. THE FISCUS

From this word comes our "confiscate," "to turn totally into the Fiscus." A fiscus was a large basket, such as were used by all Roman financial concerns to contain live vouchers. The fiscus was the organization managing the public property, income and expenditures of the Roman Emperor. It controlled the proceeds of the taxes of all the imperial provinces and of the domains, mines, quarries, fisheries, factories, town property and whatever else the fiscus held for the Emperors, impersonally. It gathered in all moneys and possessions forfeited for suicide, crime or treason.

C. THE ROMAN CALENDAR

All primitive calendars went by the moon. Moon and month are the same word in English. No more than Hengist

and Horsa could the early Romans have conceived of a month not beginning with the day of the new moon, as all months begin yet in the Jewish and Mohammedan calendars.

The first day of each month the Romans called its Kalends (announcement day). After that day they called each day so many before the Nones (half moon), then so many before the Ides (full moon), then so many to the Kalends of the next month. Julius Cæsar, impatient with the difficulties of fitting together the solar and lunar calendars, bade his experts ignore the moon and divide the solar year into twelve months. They did, and his calendar, with trifling improvements, has lasted till our days. The Romans continued to reckon days before the Nones, Ides and Kalends. The Nones fell on the seventh of March, May, July and October, on the fifth of the other months; the Ides on the fifteenth of March, May, July and October and on the thirteenth of the rest.

D. THE LEGION

The legion, always the largest fighting unit of the Roman armies, corresponded most nearly to our regiment, but had also features of our brigade. It was always rostered as of 6,000 men, all told. But the causes which operate in all armies brought it about that a legion in the field had usually about 5,000 men. It was divided into sixty bodies resembling our companies, called centuries, because nominally of 100 men, each commanded by a centurion. The Roman army never, like ours, had tiering grades of officers; it always, theoretically, consisted of soldiers, centurions and the commander: other officers were additional and special. Each centurion chose from among his men an *optio,* to assist him and to take his place if killed. These *optiones* corresponded most nearly to our corporals, but their duties and authority were always very vague. The centurions corresponded to our sergeants, in that they were picked men from the ranks, but they had all the duties and powers of our lieutenants

and, some of them, of much higher officers. Three centuries made up a maniple, more or less like one of our battalions, each commanded by its senior centurion. Two maniples made up a cohort, also commanded by its senior centurion, and the ten centurions commanding cohorts were the actual officers of the legion, its head centurion an officer of great importance.

True, a *tribunus militum* (tribune of the soldiers) was attached to each cohort; but he did more advising than commanding, though, in theory, he represented the general. The tribunes answered to our captains. Under the Empire each legion was commanded by a *legatus,* who also represented the general in his absence. Such an officer corresponded most nearly to our colonel, but had many of the characteristics of a brigadier-general.

E. *"Ubi tu Caius, ego Caia."*

These words, never varied whatever the names of the bride and groom, were the kernel of the Roman wedding ritual and after their utterance the bride was a wife. They correspond to the "I do" and "love, honor and obey" of our customary marriage formulas. As Caius and Caia were far and away the most frequent names among the Romans the phrase might be rendered: "Where you are Jack, I'm Jill."

No English words convey precisely the mingling of banter, and earnestness, of archness, devotion, shyness and fervor implied in the Latin words as uttered by Vedia.

F. OPTIONES

Private soldiers chosen by their centurions as informal assistant-centurions; to take their superior's place if he fell in battle, or was disabled or ill, and to assist him with his routine duties. They correspond more or less to the corporals of modern armies. (See also NOTE D.)

NOTES TO ANDIVIUS HEDULIO

G. SPINA

The stone wall, platform, or long narrow structure down the middle of the arena of a Roman circus, dividing its race-course into half laps. Along it the teams tore at top speed, for the short turns about its rounded ends their drivers reined them in. The spina was about 660 feet long. It varied from a low wall to a gorgeous and complicated series of structures.

H. ERGASTULUM

A hard-labor prison, whether belonging to a private person, company or municipality, usually below ground-level, for criminal, dangerous, unmanageable or runaway slaves.

J. COMMODUS AS AN ATHLETE

Even more than Babe Ruth at baseball Commodus was a wonder at beast-killing in the amphitheater. Dio Cassius, who, being a senator, looked on from a front seat, says (LXXII, 18.) that he killed a hundred bears in one day. Herodian, who grew up with men who had known Commodus and had been spectators of his prowess, says (I; 15; 3, 4, 5, 6.) that when he speared lions and leopards no one saw a second javelin cast nor any wound not fatal, that he sent his dart at will through the forehead or the heart of an animal rushing at top speed and that his missile never struck any part of a beast except so as both to wound and kill. Hurling his javelins from a distance he killed a hundred lions let out of the crypts of the Colosseum with precisely the same number of spear-casts, no dart missing its mark.